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The Metz presented in the last number of *Screen* on cinesemiotics was the early Metz, the Metz of the *Essais*, in a critical tradition which laid stress on cinema as primarily narrative and which confirmed prevailing notions of cinematic realism, the cinema's famous 'impression of reality'. Metz's semiology though a transition from that tradition, nevertheless gave it conceptual support – the finding of a syntagmatic richness (narrative), but a paradigmatic poverty, attention to the denotative aspects of cinema, its 'realism'. Metz was still locked within a linguistic structured problematic – '*cinéma, langue ou langage?*' – to which he responded by denying cinema the status of *langue*, in turn confirming the view of cinema as 'expression' and attendant notions of author as creator. System alone was reserved for narrative, Metz's *grande syntagmatique*, which underpinned his commitment to cinematic realism.

*Screen* published in its last number *Cinethique's* critique of that semiology by Michael Cegarra. In the present number, the article by Stephen Heath, 'The Work of Christian Metz', traces Metz's development from the *Essais* to his more recent '*Langage et Cinéma*', where crucial concepts of code, sub-code, textual system and displacement are elaborated, concepts which mark a significant change from the semiology in which Metz had been engaged and the stress in that semiology on realism, denotation and narrative.

Both in his essay on Metz and his comments on authorship, Heath defines the need for future work on particular texts, close analyses of unique textual systems or films, the using of Metz's work, especially on codes, for the semiological working out of the activity of individual films. This number of *Screen* goes some way in that direction, in the analyses, however partial, of *M* and of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, but particularly in Ben Brewster's comments on the *Cahiers* article on *Young Mr Lincoln*.

Brewster is concerned with the 'reading' of a specific textual system, the John Ford film, *Young Mr Lincoln*. The problem he poses is one of 'pertinence', what are the particular codes set to work in the film, and specifically, how do they work within that film. Reading is engaged with the effects of the interaction of codes within a given text ('filmic writing', 'displacement'), which cannot be produced by a simple knowledge of codes since cinematic codes are general, not specific to a particular textual system, and hence ambiguous within any particular system. Brewster introduces the concepts of 'doubling' and 'motivation' as procedures which mark the pertinent codes of a singular film text. While his analysis in part confirms the *Cahiers* 'reading in' of codes, particularly of the Lacan-Freud code for *Young Mr*

*Lincoln*, it points to the absence in their reading of the Fordian sub-code. the repression in fact of the sub-code of the author.

3

The fruitfulness of the notion of text seen as the locus for the interaction of codes, in the instance of *Young Mr Lincoln*, is demonstrated by the clarification it provides for the interaction between the generic codes in the film (youth of the hero, detective-thriller) with the Fordian sub-code (the textual system constituted by Ford's films). That process makes the generic codes and their motivations appear less specific to *Young Mr Lincoln* than the Fordian sub-code. As Ben Brewster points out, this is an affirmation in part of the procedures of author criticism.

Brewster's conclusion gives added relevance to Ed Buscombe's account of author theory and Stephen Heath's comments, particularly Heath's call for a theory of the subject. Ben Brewster indicated the Fordian sub-code as one among a number which intersect within the text and structure the activity of the text. If author criticism is confirmed thereby it is confirmation of an authorial system/code as an element, often crucial, in the work of the text. It is not a confirmation of the ideological construct of the author as punctual source, creator. The concept of text developed by Brewster and Heath in this number is pivotal for a theory of the subject which will displace rather than re-anchor traditional notions.

We regret that acknowledgment to Mouton & Co was omitted from the last issue (v 14 n 1/2) and *Screen* would like to thank them for their kind permission to reprint and translate Christian Metz's 'Methodological Propositions for the Analysis of Film', from *Essays in Semiotics*.



# FRANK TASHLIN

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Stephen Heath

*The following conventions are used in the text for the references to books by Metz:*

ESC, I & II = *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, Vols. I & II  
 LC = *Langage et Cinéma*

*Articles or interviews by Metz not collected in Essais sur la signification au cinéma and referred to in the text are mentioned as Metz (a), (b), etc, full details being given in the bibliography. Other writings are mentioned by author's name or, in the case of collective texts, title of review and again full details are to be found in the bibliography.*

Any consideration of semiology in relation to the particular signifying practice of film passes inevitably through a reference to the work of Christian Metz. To say this is to acknowledge at once the pioneering nature of that work and its importance; pioneering in so far as it is with Metz's work that is begun the elaboration of a semiology of film – it could be said that the initial volume of *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* (the earliest text in which, the famous 'Le cinéma: langue ou langage?', was originally published in 1964) represents the first book to be written in this field (which is not in any sense to ignore or reduce the contributions made by previous theoretical writings on film) – and important not merely because of this primacy but also because of the issues it raises in terms of the models and analyses constructed and tested in the course of that elaboration, issues that have become crucial to the contemporary argument even – precisely – at those points where Metz's own positions and arguments may be called critically into question. In fact, the development of Metz's semiology itself might be grasped in connection with its posing and exploration of a central issue; it is given as a systematic appeal to the methods and concepts of modern linguistic theory in order to examine rigorously the prevalent metaphor in writing on film of *cinematic language*, it turns on the attempt 'to see what was concealed by that metaphor and to mobilise for that purpose in a reasonably coherent and "compact" manner the experience of those who

\* This article was originally presented as a paper at a BFI/SEFT seminar held in the Spring of 1973

6 have the best studied language, the experience, that is, of linguists' (ESC, II, p 95).

The aim of the present paper is to provide notes for an introduction of Metz's work and to this end it will try to outline simply certain problems developed in and posed by that work. Such an aim does not, of course, imply any claim to giving an exhaustive treatment of all aspects of Metz's various writings (thus, for instance, little will be said concerning his particular analyses of such elements as punctuation (ESC, II, pp 111-137), trick effects (ESC, II, pp 173-192), etc). Moreover, it may at times be necessary to consider certain problems that are not directly posed by Metz (in some sense it will then be exactly this exclusion that raises the problem) and one or two somewhat oblique, 'personal' reflections may make an occasional and marginal appearance. All this will sufficiently indicate the rather fragmentary nature of this paper (no more than a set of notes); it makes, be it stressed from the outset, no pretence to the production of any synthetic unity.

## I

The semiology of film will be the study of film as signifying object, as unit of discourse: 'the only principle of pertinence capable of defining at the present time the semiology of film is . . . the will to treat films as texts, as units of discourse, thus putting oneself under the obligation to look for the different systems (whether or not they be codes) which structure and are implicit in them' (LC, p 14). Defined in these terms, such a semiology aims at a mastery of the filmic fact in its totality: 'one can – one must – give for objective to the semiology of film the total study of filmic discourse considered as an integrally signifying area . . .' (LC, p 13). A semiology of film presented in this way as aiming at the total study of filmic discourse then rejoins necessarily (by virtue of the heterogeneity of codes on which that discourse is realised) the semiological enterprise at the point of its overall ambition as general science of cultural systems and logics; the semiology of film, in other words, is constantly involved with codes that cross a range of languages (codes of narrative for example) and thus in a reference to other semiologies (just as they in turn may need to refer to film semiology), to, finally, the elaboration of that general science of semiology. The 'purity' of film – that 'purity' which an insistent criticism has been concerned to determine and preserve – is purely imaginary, but this recognition does not mean – it is here that semiology changes the terms of the argument – that film is to be reduced to something else (literature for instance).

Within the perspective of the general enterprise of semiology and within the perspective of the development of a semiology of film, Metz's work is devoted to the study of *cinematic* codes, of those codes specific to film (thus, in his terms, according to a distinction operated between film/cinema, to a semiology of

cinema): his project is to locate certain elements of film and with them to construct cinematic codes: 'certain filmic features are *cinematically pertinent*, others are not' (LC, p 36). Metz's semiology, therefore, may be defined as the study of cinematic language (a definition which refinds the emphasis given in the title of that early article mentioned above). Alongside this limitation of a particular area of concentration, however, Metz continues to refer back to the aim of a total study contained in the notion of a semiology of film, stressing, for example, with regard to that aim, the need to undertake the semiological analysis of films as singular textual systems, the need for the analysis of filmic writing.

With these precisions in mind, and anticipating on their development and explication later in this paper, it may be useful here to give Metz's summary midway through *Langage et Cinéma* of the idea of a semiology of film in relation to three crucial points of emphasis:

the semiology of the filmic fact must have permanently at its disposal three notions between which it is able to move rapidly at any moment . . . they are:

1. that of filmic texts, which can present different degrees of material amplitude, the privileged degree being the single complete film (= notion of 'film' in its enumerative sense).
2. that of textual filmic systems, that is, the filmic systems which correspond to these different texts.
3. that of non-textual filmic systems, that is, codes, which themselves present various degrees of generality (= distinction between codes and sub-codes) and which may be, according to the particular case, either cinematic or extra-cinematic; those of them which are cinematic constitute, taken as a whole, the 'cinematic language'.

The particular task of the semiology of the filmic fact could thus be summarised in the following manner: the analysis of filmic texts in order to disengage either textual systems or cinematic codes or sub-codes (LC, p 112).

This initial account may be completed by the addition of two brief remarks. Firstly, the activity of the semiologist is the construction of systems and codes; in this, his procedure is the inverse of that of the ciné/easte, who aims at constructing a text, and parallel to that of the spectator, who aims at an understanding, a reading. Where the reading of the latter is 'immediate' (cultural), however, that of the semiologist is produced as analytical, an understanding of how the film is understood, of how it signifies, of its system(s) of intelligibility. Secondly, semiology is invariably characterised by Metz as being solely *descriptive*, as being not in any way *normative* or *prescriptive*. This characterisation, derived from the use of the opposition science/ideology in a way that refers to certain Althusserian formulations, serves to mark the

- 8 distance of semiology from the general, massively available criticism of film (compare, for instance – the example is taken at random – the formulation from *Langage et Cinéma* quoted above with the argument towards a definition of ‘the cinematic structure’ in John Howard Lawson’s *Film: The Creative Process*) but its terms are not without posing serious difficulties.

## II

This account of Metz’s conception of the semiology of film has assumed various terms and positions, the argument of various issues, which must now be given some explanation and definition. It has also assumed, and thus concealed, a particular process of development in Metz’s thinking over the past few years which has involved major changes of emphasis and formulation in relation to earlier points of view. Some insight into this process can be gained by considering the central debate over the question of the whole idea of *cinematic language*.

‘*Le cinéma: langue ou langage?*’. The pressure of the question is evident; as linguistics is developed as a science in the construction of its specific object (Saussurian *langue*), so semiology is led to conceive its development in terms of the possibility of a similar construction and the initial debate inevitably hinges on the question of *cinema langue* or *langage*. To this question the 1964 article (ESC, I, pp 39-93) gave an answer that may be summarised succinctly enough as the view that cinema is a language without *langue* (ESC, I, p 51). The reasons for this are threefold; taking a definition of *langue* as ‘a system of signs for the purpose of intercommunication’ (ESC, I, p 79), *cinema* is seen as lacking such a basis because (1) it is a one-way communication (no return channel of communication for the receiver-audience); (2) it is only partly a system; (3) it lacks signs (ESC, I, p 79). Without going into the details of this view, it can be noted that the first of these reasons leads Metz into a definition of cinema in terms of expression as opposed to communication in a way which tends to an idea of cinema as ‘pure *parole*’ and which links with a general conception of cinema as expressivity to which Metz seems heavily to assent at this period, while the second and third, which are interdependent, turn largely on the position occupied by, and the idea held of, the filmic image in the debate.

It is the idea of the image that represents the blind spot of Metz’s initial formulations, the point at which the articulation of significance collapses in the face of analogy. It is the ‘pure analogy’ of the image (ESC, I, p 51) that determines the absence of signs; where the linguistic sign is arbitrary, the image of a dog resembles a dog; the distance between *signifiant* and *signifié* is minimum, there being a ‘quasi-fusion’ of the two. The image is envisaged as a duplication of reality: ‘cinema has for its basic material a set of fragments of the real world mediated by their

mechanical duplication' (ESC, II, p 49). Hence cinema lacks any equivalent to the double articulation of linguistic *langue*, its very economy, the combination of systematically defined units of a lower level (phonemes) to form units of a higher level (monemes); instead of articulation, duplication, instead of economy, an infinity of analogical resemblance.

The fact of the difference between linguistic sign and image is not in doubt and one may be ready to talk of 'iconic system of the film which is based on the rule of similarity to things' (Sieminska, p 418), though this is already in some sense to change the problematic, but a semiology cannot remain locked in the observation of that difference, playing off the arbitrary against the natural. In fact, Metz's early statements concerning the image almost always add the condition that the image is not reality, that it is a mediation, that it is a 'deformation' (ESC, I, p 111) and it should be noted in this connection that the majority of those statements, as, for example, those quoted in the previous paragraph, are somewhat obliquely assumed, being given as summaries of the position of the work of Jean Mitry (this is to call to mind the context in which Metz's work appears and against which it is, with difficulty, carried through; see in this respect his two long essays on Mitry's massive *Esthétique et Psychologie du Cinéma* (ESC, II, pp 13-34) and his 1972 comments on his relation to Mitry's work and the tradition it represents (ESC, II, pp 11 - 12)).<sup>2</sup> As generally in this kind of discussion however, the qualifying condition tends to be overshadowed and the impression of reality that cinema may produce is seized directly as 'reality' foreclosing the thinking of the production of that impression of reality (one might remember here the importance of the notion of the 'impression of reality') in writings on cinema and notably the work done in the context of the *Revue Internationale de Filmologie* towards the demonstration and explication of this impression - it is within the tradition of this work that Metz initially published one or two phenomenological approaches to film (ESC, I, pp 11-35); the explication serves, in fact, less to analyse the production of that impression than to confirm its reality, it becoming an established and unchallengeable fact: cinema equals impression of reality. Film is pushed at the extreme outside of any comprehension of its activity in terms of signifying system into a realm of pure expressivity; as a Pasolini will then put it: 'The cinema is a language which expresses reality with reality' (Pasolini, p 29).

This idea of the image and the conceptions it sustains such as have been outlined above have been radically criticised, not least by Metz himself in a way which leads, as will be seen in a moment, to a shift in the terms of his semiology and in the debate *langue* or *langage*. Thus, the whole question of duplication has been modified by the introduction of a debate concerning the ideological limitations of the camera; its development, for example, with regard to

10 the reconstitution of a certain familiar monocular perspective set up in the Renaissance. (Metz briefly discusses the points raised by this debate in an interview given in 1970; Metz (a), p 22). Thus, again, the calling into doubt, notably in so far as influence on Metz is concerned by the work of Umberto Eco, of the simple opposition between analogy and code.<sup>3</sup> Eco identifies, for instance, a process of 'triple articulation' in the image and distinguishes some ten or so codes potentially operative in the communication of images (Eco, pp 105-160). It is this recognition of codes at work in the image, of the possibility of analogy being itself the result of codes, which marks a decisive process of rethinking in Metz's writings.

As has been said, this rethinking involves not simply the fact of the image. The key term here is *code*, which introduces a suppleness into the theory and allows it to break new ground. The focus on codes in the analysis of analogy is not an attempt to reduce analogy to *langue*; the distance separating analogical from arbitrary codes remains, but code is not uniquely grasped in terms of the model of *langue* (in which precisely code and arbitrary are confounded). To think in terms of codes is to break the useful but restrictive model of *langue*; it is here, in fact, that Metz is able to recast the debate over *langue/langage* in cinema.

Consider, for instance, the question of the identification of minimal units. One of the basic activities of linguistics is the decomposition of its object of study into sets of minimal elements, giving a description of the system of relations in which they are defined and of the rules of their combination; thus the description of phonemes and monemes (of the double articulation of *langue*). Traditionally, there has always been a temptation in thinking cinema to take the image as a word, the sequence of images as a sentence. Such a temptation forms part of that metaphor of cinematic language the exploration of which is the impetus of Metz's semiology and the course of this exploration leads to the rejection of this kind of parallelism between cinema and language. The image is not a sign; there is no double articulation; cinema is characterised by a paradigmatic poverty (ESC, I, pp 102-103); every image is particular and individual and there can be no possibility of commutation, merely an infinite set of possibilities of image: 'in cinema . . . the number of realisable images is indefinite. Indefinite several times over, indeed, for profilmic events are themselves unlimited in number' (ESC, I, pp 102-103), every image is a neologism (ESC, I, p 102). This is again the context of Metz's definition of cinema as language without *langue*: the image is pure *parole* and the idea of a semiology in this field can only be maintained by limiting its area of study to syntagmatic relations, the combination of images into sequences, to, in fact, narrative (a point to which this paper will return below). Thinking in codes marks a disengagement from this context; instead of the monolithic search

for the minimal unit (the filmic word) and the reduction of system to the extreme formalisation of the double articulation of *langue*, it determines a response to cinema as a complexity of codes of differing kind and degree of systematicity, ranging from levels of analysis as varied as those of Eco's iconological-iconographical codes and Metz's own narrative code (the 'grande syntagmatique'). The refusal of cinema as *langue* does not entail the impossibility of a semiology nor does it entail the limitation of that semiology to the area of narrative. What is in question is the avoidance of a certain 'terrorism' of language in the examination of other languages (signifying practices) which leads to the identification of code and *langue* and the involvement in a rigid structuralism unable to deal with the structuration of, in the present case, the filmic text and its interrelations with other forms of signifying practice; acts of communication are not necessarily founded on a code similar to the code of *langue* and a language may be in the area of a multiplicity of codes. It is from such a recognition that the problems of the specificity of cinema are to be posed and not from the simple application of the *langue/parole* model in straight linguistic terms. (For Metz's autocriticism in this respect, see the footnotes added at the time of their publication in book form to the various articles collected in *ESC I* and *II*.)

### III

It was said previously that one result of the debate concerning *langue* in cinema was to lead Metz to define his semiology in terms of the study of syntagmatic relations and notably of narrative relations. Some mention should be made of his study at this point, not least because it represents an area in which Metz has produced analytical tools and models of great value.

The focus on syntagmatic relations 'saves' semiology (in so far as it is held in the *langue* or *langage* debate) in the face of the paradigmatic poverty of cinema. A central part of Metz's work within this focus then becomes the analysis of what he calls the 'grande syntagmatique', the aim of the analysis being the elucidation of the system of the organisation of the spatio-temporal logic within the area of the sequence in narrative cinema. It is a question, that is, of analysing the film, as 'maximum syntagm' (*ESC*, I, p 125), into the possible set of narrative 'figures' or 'autonomous segments' (*ESC*, I, p 125). The result of the analysis is the construction of a model consisting of eight types of autonomous segment, each type being the *signifiant* of a *signifié* defined in terms of a particular spatio-temporal value in the narrative action (*ESC*, I, pp 111-146). The descriptive possibilities of this model are demonstrated by Metz in a detailed breakdown of Rozier's *Adieu Philippine* into some eighty-three segments (*ESC*, I, pp 151-181).

It is not the purpose of the present paper to provide a full



12 account of this model (the detail can be found in *Screen* v 14 n 1/2, pp 114-118); let it simply be said that the model and the discussion involved in its elaboration offer a necessary point of reflection for any treatment of narrative in cinema. What does need some emphasis here is the way in which Metz's analysis of the '*grande syntagmatique*' in fact proceeds as the establishment of a paradigm of units of film at the level of its narrative construction. The analysis works by commutation, defining a series of pertinent oppositions that allow the distinction of the various narrative segments or figures. As shown in the linguistic models to which Metz so often refers, an attention to syntagmatic relations finds itself interdependent with some recognition of paradigmatic relations (of the units that combine syntagmatically); in the moment of pitching his semiology at the level of the former, Metz also brings the latter into view and at the end of the analysis cinema is found to have at least a certain paradigmatic richness, Metz confessing himself in 1968 to be 'less sceptical' in this respect (*ESC*, I, pp 76, 104-105). This weakening of scepticism is not then, however, the resurgence of the stumbling-block of the identification of code and *langue*. (Metz indicates this in the way he hesitates with regard to the '*grande syntagmatique*' between talking of a grammar and talking of a rhetoric; *ESC*, I, p 119). The '*grande syntagmatique*' is seen not as the *langue* of cinema but as one of the codes at work in the structuration of films, codes that it is precisely the task of semiology to describe. The stress on codes, moreover, opens onto the fact that many of the codes at work in film have to be thought in relation to an understanding of a process of development of cinematic codifications. In no sense did the talkie have to develop the code of *langue*, merely to accept it, but it may be possible to trace the development of certain codifications of the use of language in film, perhaps a systematic code, as is suggested, for instance, by the common judgement that *Citizen Kane* is the first film that uses speech cinematically. The '*grande syntagmatique*' can evidently be grasped in such a historical development, converging as rhetoric on a series of cultural forms that it creates cinematically and analysable thus in its limitations.

The last remark will require expansion later in this paper. It is enough for the moment to simply note Metz's initial identity of cinema, language and narration – 'it is in one and the same movement that cinema made itself narrative and that it gained some of the attributes of a language' (*ESC*, I, p 99) – and the continuing characterisation in 1972 of his semiology as a 'theory of the film-novel' (*ESC*, II, p 12).

#### IV

Let us come back at this point to the debate concerning cinematic language and try to define Metz's position subsequent to the shift mentioned above in section II. In so doing, it will be possible to

The principal object of Metz's semiology is the analysis of cinematic language (the other major area of a semiological approach to film being seen by Metz as the analysis of filmic writing, an idea that will receive discussion below). Cinematic language is now defined as the totality of cinematic codes and sub-codes in so far as the differences separating them are provisionally set aside so that the various codes may be treated as one unitary system (LC, pp 51, 98). It might, therefore, be possible to conceive of this language as the master-structure of a multiplicity of structures (LC, p 187), but such a conception tends to reintroduce a notion that Metz is constantly seeking to combat, that of there being one unique, basic cinematic code (LC, pp 29, 50-51, etc.). The advantage of the term 'cinematic language' lies simply in the possibility it allows at certain levels of the analysis of thinking of the various cinematic codes in one block together (the possibility of what Metz calls a 'general neutralisation') in order to arrive at propositions of the type, 'There is nothing in cinematic language that corresponds to the word in linguistic language.'

The choice of the term 'language' (*langage*) and the insistence on the plurality of cinematic codes are crucial (it is here that we come to the renewal of the debate on *langue/langage* in a changed perspective). Metz recognises that it is not possible for semiology to determine for cinema a construction equivalent to the constructions determined in linguistics for natural languages of the kind of Saussurean *langue* or Chomskyan *competence*, abstractions that englobe the range of manifestations of a language (instances of *parole* or level of *performance*) in terms of models that account for the process of signification, the linking of semantic and phonological components, via sign and system (structure) in Saussure, via syntactic structure in Chomsky. The use by Metz of the term 'language' (*langage*) is then a response, as has been seen, to the lack of this kind of general coherence in cinema: 'this language has neither the same cohesion nor the same precision as a *langue* (moreover, it still has to be established)' (LC, p 111); 'cinematic language is different – rather than "distinct" – from what a *langue* would be, but it serves instead of it (for here no *langue* exists)' (LC, p 202). At the same time, 'cinematic language' now lays stress on the existence of a *plurality of codes*; contrary to *langue* ('*le code de la langue*', Saussure), language is not a single code but the combination of several codes: 'just as one single code can be manifested in several languages, so a single language can manifest several codes, certain of these being not specific to that language. The non-coincidence between codes (homogenous systematic unities) and languages (homogenous physical unities) is a very widespread phenomenon . . .' (LC, p 25). Thus in natural language, the general code of *langue* is manifested along with a

- 14 range of other codes (of politeness, familiarity, narrative, literature, etc) some of which are specific to this language (eg literature) while others move across the various languages (eg politeness). Metz emphasises the 'heterogeneity of codes' that is characteristic of all "languages" of some importance' (LC, p 25) and consequently, cinema being precisely a language of some importance, the 'pluricodic character of cinema', 'the heterogeneity of cinematic language' (LC, p 143). Analysis has, therefore, to deal with cinema as specific configuration of codes; in so doing, it seeks to determine those codes that are specific to cinema, that are *cine-matic* ('each language is specific not only by the combination of its codes, but also by certain of the codes that participate in that combination', LC, p 187).

These general remarks may be complemented by the following points which indicate difficulties that crucially engage Metz's semiology. 1. It was suggested that the term 'cinematic language' is simply used to block together the various cinematic codes in a way which, while avoiding the notion of a single 'organic' cinematic code, allows, nevertheless, certain overall propositions to be formulated concerning the nature of signification in cinema; it is thus that cinematic language, in Metz's phrase, serves instead of *langue* and it is thus too that cinematic language is a construction of analysis, like the codes that it brings together (LC, p 59). Yet at times the term '(cinematic) language' seems to be placed in a somewhat different context of definition, that given in the characterisation of a language in terms – borrowed from Hjelmslev – of its matter of expression; a characterisation which places cinematic language not on the side of semiological analysis but on that of initial perception. Metz provides a particularly clear instance of such a characterisation (formulated in a way which resembles formulations attacked with some irony by Metz himself at the beginning of *Langage et Cinéma*) in the course of an interview with Raymond Bellour:

It seems to me that one may call 'language' a unity that is defined in terms of matter of expression (a Hjelmslevian notion) or of 'typical sign' as Barthes puts it in *Elements of Semiology*. Literary language is the set of messages whose matter of expression is writing; cinematic language is the set of messages which are identical in their matter of expression, this being here fivefold: moving photographic image, recorded phonetic sound, recorded noises, recorded musical sound, writing (credits, inter-titles etc). Thus 'language' is a technico-sensorial unity, immediately graspable in perceptual experience . . .' (ESC, II, pp 207-208).

(Compare in a passage quoted earlier the notion of 'homogenous physical unity'). 2. The specificity of the cinema, cinematic language, may be defined in terms of a combination of codes but this definition will involve simultaneously for Metz the disengagement

of those codes specific to cinema (cinematic codes). The specificity of these codes will derive from the particular nature of the language (in the sense specified in the preceding quotation); in other words, their formal characteristics will be linked to characteristics, certain pertinent traits, of the matter of expression. It is here that the problematic set up by the movement mentioned in 1, from cinematic language as a set of codes to the definition of that language in terms of matter expression is to be understood: 'the position that is here adopted contains two stages, not one only: firstly, the specificity with which semiology is concerned is that of codes, not the "brute" specificity of physical *signifiants*; secondly, the specificity of specific codes is nevertheless connected to certain traits of the matter of expression.' (LC, p 165)

## V

The term 'code' (in the opposition code/message) is used by Metz to refer to the formal machines constructed in analysis in order to render account of a particular area of (the process of) signification in a set of messages. As such, a code is distinguished by its coherence, its homogeneity, its systematicity, in the face of the heterogeneity of the message articulated across several codes. (In the field with which Metz is concerned this distinction can be made as that between *film* and *cinema*: 'film is on the side of the message (and thus of the heterogeneous), cinema is on that of the specific and homogenous (thus of the code)', LC, p 44; 'cinema' circumscribes within the filmic certain cinematic facts, those that may be shown by semiological analysis to depend on codes specific to film). 'If a code is a code, it is because it offers a unitary area of commutations, that is, a (reconstructed) "sector" within which variations of the *signifiant* correspond to variations of the *signifié*, within which a certain number of units acquire their meaning in their relations with one another' (LC, p 20). In fact, such a definition, tending as it does to suggest the coherence of a *langue*, may be too strong, for, as has been seen, one of the major problems confronted by Metz's semiology is that of the difficulty of utilising the idea of *langue* in cinema, a difficulty crystallised in the recognition of certain cinematic codes as systems of *signifiants* without *signifiés*. In this context, the essence of the notion of 'code' may lie less on the process of signification, the relation of *signifiant* and *signifié*, than on its definition of a system of constraints or, to put it another way, of a system of possibilities, of choices, the system bearing equally on paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations (the two being constantly interdependent in the course of the analysis). 'What is called a code is a logical entity constructed in order to explain and elucidate the functioning of paradigmatic relations in the texts and to explain and elucidate the functioning of syntagmatic relations in these same texts. The code carries in it the intelligibility of the syntagm as well as that of the paradigm,

16 without itself being either paradigm or syntagm' (LC, p 122).

In relation to this conception of code, the following propositions need to be noted for their importance in the theoretical framework of Metz's semiology. 1. A code is never exhausted in a single film (as *langue* is never exhausted in any particular instance of *parole*); a code has by definition a (certain) generality. Thus, while every code is a system, not every system is a code; this being Metz's contrast between code and the textual or singular system of a film, an organisation that is not a code though it is realised across a series of codes. 2. Just as a language may manifest several codes, so a code may be manifested in several languages (see section IV above). 3. The notion of specificity in Metz's writings is crucially connected with the notion of codes, specificity being defined as a particular combination of codes and/or in terms of certain codes that are only manifested in a particular language-matter of expression. 4. A more specific code is not necessarily of greater importance than a less specific code in a given language. 5. The combination of codes in a language might itself be grasped as a code, as 'a system of inter-codic relations'; this system provides the very model of the specificity of a language (defined with regard to its combination of codes) and is covered by the use of the term 'cinematic language' previously described.

Metz relies on two further distinctions in his development of the notion of code with regard to cinema. The first of these is that between cinematic *codes* and *sub-codes* and is initially made in *Langage et Cinéma* as that between general and particular cinematic codes. General cinematic codes are those systematic constructions which operate in the organisation of elements that are not simply specific to films but which are effectively or potentially common to all films; thus, for instance, the general code of cinematic punctuation. Particular cinematic codes are those systematic constructions which organise elements that, while specific to films (this is the justification for the term 'cinematic'), only appear in certain classes of films (this being their particularity); thus the particular codes of punctuation peculiar to certain schools or genres of films (the terms 'school' and 'genre' are not exhaustive of the different sets over which a particular code may be operative).

The example of punctuation suggests the reason for the movement to the formulation in terms of cinematic codes and sub-codes. The relation between general and particular is that between code and sub-code; the particular code determines a certain value for its elements which is only one of those permitted by the general code. Such a relation might be thought of as analogous to that between the various sub-codes of a natural language and the general code of *langue* which gives the possibility of their realisation. This analogy is seen by Metz, however, as needing an important qualification: in language the general code has a high degree of stability and coherence that is definable with precision

outside of reference to the various sub-codes; in cinema the relative strengths of codes and sub-codes can often be seen to lie in favour of the latter, a cinematic code being rather a problem of coding, the virtual position, as it were, of a diversity of possible or future codifications:

At the extreme, and by perhaps forcing things a little, one might conceive of a certain type of code which, outside of any positive stipulation, would be defined solely as the *position common to several sub-codes*, as a *calculus* (in the logical sense of the term) of possible codifications, as the area without which it would be impossible to understand that these sub-codes bear on the same point of the cinematic process and are held in mutual relations of competition (LC, p 105).

The context of the conception of this type of code is again Metz's identification of a number of important general cinematic codes as systems of *signifiants* without *signifiés*; an element such as *fondue-enchaîné*, though evidently cinematic and definable in terms of a code in the relations of commutation it sustains with a series of other elements, acquires a precise value only in a particular, sub-code.

It is important, moreover, not to confuse codes and sub-codes. Codes are not in competition with one another in the sense that they do not intervene at the same point of filmic process; there is no choice between, say, lighting and montage. Choice arises between the various sub-codes of a code, they being in a relation of mutual exclusion; there is no possibility of choosing at one and the same time the montage developed in Russian films of the twenties and that associated with the theories of Bazin. Codes and sub-codes of different codes are in a (syntagmatic) relation of addition and combination; sub-codes of the same code are in a (paradigmatic) relation of substitution.

The second distinction on which Metz relies is that between codes of expression and codes of content, a distinction that is introduced in connection with the problem of the specificity of cinematic language. If that specificity is defined solely with regard to the particular combination of codes, analysis fails to deal with the fact that some codes are felt to be more specific to film than others and it is this failure that that distinction is used to avoid. In a given language there may be distinguished codes of expression and codes of content (these codes not ceasing to involve some system of signification, a system of *signifiants* and *signifiés*, even though the latter may be unstable, given only partial definition in sub-codes), it thus being possible for a particular code to find itself, in relation to the overall text of a language, unilaterally on the side of content or of expression. (It should be noted that the distinction between codes of expression and codes of content is not – as, indeed, is clearly indicated by the notion of code – the

18 traditional opposition of form and content; cf ESC, II, pp 97-110). In order to exemplify a code of expression one might think of the signifying unit represented by alternative montage: within the code in which it finds its reality as signifying unit (in fact, the code of the '*grande syntagmatique*' ) it carries at once a *signifiant* (the pattern of alternating images) and a *signifié* (the indication of a simultaneity between the corresponding actions): within the film as a whole it remains entirely on the side of expression, such a unit of montage being chosen to recount such and such an episode. Codes of content are characterised by Metz as being semantic codes potentially capable of manifestation in any language and thus having no pertinent relation with any particular matter of expression, being entirely on the side of content in a given language; an example would be that of codes of narrativity. (For a semiology directed towards the study of codes of this latter order, one might refer to Greimas (a) and (b)).

The following points might also be noted in this context. 1. This distinction between codes of content and of expression is not seen by Metz as implying a rigid separation of the two orders of codes in the film text; on the contrary, he attempts to describe their mutually defining interaction at the level of the work of displacement operated in filmic writing (the activity of the film). 2. The characterisation of codes of content in the terms given above raises a number of problems. Following Hjelmslev, Metz distinguishes specialised and non-specialised languages; the former, as, for example, the system of road signs, have a limited sector of sense, the latter, as, most evidently, natural language, have a matter of content that is co-extensive with the totality of the semantic tissue. Cinema is a non-specialised language, yet certain codes of content, despite their characterisation as of potentially universal manifestation, seem not, in fact, susceptible to manifestation in cinematic language, this not, however, being the result of a clearly defined specialisation. This seems to imply a further problem of specificity of the codes of content/codes of expression distinction to deal with the question of specificity. The whole problem is posed, moreover, in certain instances of contemporary cinematic practice (films of the *Groupe Dziga-Vertov*).

## VI

In the light of discussion in the preceding paragraphs, it is now possible to read with greater precision the summary of the idea of a semiology of film given at the outset of this paper (section I) and in particular the third of the three points of emphasis it stresses. According to that emphasis, a semiology of film must dispose of the notion of 'non-textual filmic systems (= codes), which themselves present various degrees of generality (= distinction between 'codes and sub-codes) and which may be . . . either cinematic or extra-cinematic; those of them which are cinematic constitute,

taken as a whole, the "cinematic language" (LC, p 112). The codes are not the particular systems of individual films (texts) but more general systems operative over a range of films (sub-codes) or over all films (codes). Codes which are particular to films are the *cinematic* codes and the whole body of these codes makes up the cinematic language.

*Cinematic* language may be given an initial immediate definition with regard to its matter of expression (moving photographic image, recorded phonetic sound, recorded noises, recorded musical sound, writing). Such definition of a language represents the direct apprehension of it as technico-sensorial unity but remains inoperative with regard to the identification of its structural specificity. A semiology, attentive by definition to the process of signification and thus, in Hjelmslevian terminology (a terminology to which Metz constantly appeals), to the form and substance of expression and the form and substance of content, recasts the problem of specificity in the study of the series of codes at work in the given 'unity' (the inverted commas there marking the critical change of perspective implied). The specificity of the language may then be grasped as its particular combination of codes but this conception may also be extended through what amounts to a return to the defining possibilities of matter of expression: certain codes depend on particular traits of the matter of expression and are specific to a language having that matter. Metz gives a description of the configuration of codes of expression in the picture track in terms of a number of circles:

the specificity of cinema – if, as is the general argument of this book, it be defined with reference to codes – is a phenomenon of great internal complexity which is ordered, so to speak, according to a certain number of *circles*, concentric or secant; each circle marks off what in set theory is called a class: a group of codes and at the same time a group of languages [ie technico-sensorial unities]: the set of languages to which this group of codes is exclusively attached (LC, p 171).

Thus, for example, the circle of the codes of iconicity will englobe a group of languages ranging from figurative painting through comic strips to cinema, while that of the codes relating to the movement of images will cut such a circle only to encompass animated cartoon, television and cinema (cf LC, pp 171-176).

A language is specific by its combination of codes and by certain of the codes it combines. The term 'cinematic language' in Metz holds both sides of that recognition, but it is the disengagement of these latter codes that becomes the principal aim of his semiology and the term then refers to the block of these codes.

## VII

Metz's semiology is thus projected as a semiology of *cinema*, understanding 'cinema' there according to the opposition film/cinema



20 with which Metz works and which has been increasingly brought out in preceding sections. Within the unit of the film, 'cinema' circumscribes those elements which are specific to films; a construction of analysis (the identification of a set of codes), it then splits the unity of the film and produces a generality that is not exhausted in any particular film.

To this extent, the opposition between film and cinema is that between a real and an ideal object, like that between utterance and *langue* (LC, p 17);

The film . . . is the place where extra-cinematic elements are *filmicised*: integrated in the system of a particular filmic discourse. It is also – it is equally – the place where *cinematic* elements are similarly filmicised (the definition of this term remaining the same) (LC, p 87).

The definition of film in this way does not, however, relegate it to some realm of the 'natural': 'the deep unity of a film, as of every social phenomenon, is in the end a network of a systematic kind and the semiology of filmic facts . . . must interest itself in particular films as much as in cinema' (LC, p 16). It is here, coming back once again to the summary quoted in section I, that the notion of 'textual filmic system' is important.

The term 'textual system' (initially 'singular system') is used to refer to the organisation of a film (text) considered as a singular totality:

Every film has its particular structure, which is an overall organisation, a network in which everything holds together, in short a system; but this system is valid only for the one film; it is a configuration resulting from various choices, as from a certain combination of the elements chosen. These choices have been effected amongst the resources offered by various cinematic codes (general or particular) –, but equally by non-cinematic codes (LC, p 46).

It may be noted 1. that the textual system is not to be considered as a code; it lacks, as the term 'singular system' indicates, the generality of a code (a code being a system that is valid for a group of texts which, grasped in analysis from this point of view, become so many *messages*) and describes only the particular organisation of a single film: 2. that the study of a textual system is not the study of cinematic specificity, this latter involving, as Metz insists, the distinction of codes: 3. that the textual system, like these codes, is constructed by analysis – an analysis bearing on the study of a singular system seeks to construct the system of the given film or text; text and system are thus in Metz's theory held in relation of opposition as, respectively, 'attested process and constructed intelligibility' (LC, p 57): 4. that, like codes, the

textual system contains a set of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations. What is interesting here is the possibility of 'inter-codicity' exploited by these relations. Where in terms of codes a paradigm and syntagm is established between elements belonging to one and the same code, in a textual system they 'cross' codes. In fact, with regard to syntagmatic relations this inter-codicity in textual systems is relatively banal; it is a question simply of the combination within a single sequence or shot of elements deriving from a diversity of codes (montage, lighting, dialogue, etc). With regard to paradigmatic relations, however, it takes on a critical and auto-reflexive character; thus certain films which construct disruptive relations of substitution between elements from two or more different codes: 5. that although the idea of textual system has – in accordance with *Langage et Cinéma* – been defined in particular relation to the unit of the single film, Metz can allow the idea to operate also in relation to more, or less, extended units; thus, for example, a group of films considered on the basis of some criterion of resemblance or kinship as a single continuous text ('plurifilmic text') or a particular sequence of a film taken as a textual unit for which an attempt is made to determine the singular system (one might think in this context of Raymond Bellour's analysis of a six-minute sequence from *The Birds*).

The constitution of the text or film is an activity that works with and against the various codes; an activity that Metz refers to as the process of *filmic writing*. By contrast to cinematic language, *filmic writing* is not itself a set of codes but an operation, precisely a process, – the production of the particular configuration, with its particular system, that is the individual film. This operation is often described by Metz as that of a displacement:

the system of the text is the instance which *displaces* the codes, deforming each of them through the presence of the others, contaminating the ones by the others, replacing in the process one code by another and in the end – as the provisionally 'fixed' result of this general displacement – *placing* each code in a determined position in the overall structure . . . (LC, p 77-78).

Filmic writing thus includes what in film aesthetics is traditionally called 'composition', but it does so in stressing the film's production in relation to a set of codes and hence in stressing the film as signifying practice in a way which breaks with prevalent notions of 'inspiration', 'spontaneity', etc: 'If film is "invention" or "creation" it is so solely in so far as it is *operation*, as it adds something to pre-existing codes, as it brings with it structural configurations not anticipated by any one of them' (LC, p 78). Filmic writing marks, in fact, the passage from thinking of the film as object to its thinking as signifying practice.

To conclude with the summary from which we began, it will be seen that a full semiological approach to film must comprehend

- 22 the two emphases offered in the cinematic language/filmic writing distinction. 'The particular task of the semiology of the filmic fact could thus be summarised in the following manner: the analysis of filmic texts in order to disengage either textual systems of cinematic codes or sub-codes.' (LC, p 112) If Metz's own work is engaged with the latter, he never hesitates to lay stress also on the importance of the former.

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The concern of these sections (I – VII) has been to outline the overall theoretical framework of Metz's semiology and to suggest the place of one or two methodological propositions within that framework. In short, what has been described is in some sense a *programme*, the details of which will clearly pose a number of problems for discussion. The return on those details in the following pages will be, as was mentioned at the very start of the paper, somewhat oblique, occasionally marginal to the terms of that framework. They should read as offering merely one or two points of reflection, sketchily introduced and lacking in any real consecutive development, much more so in any 'systematicity'.

\* \* \*

The history of the cinema is the history of its development as narrative. There is little need to adduce evidence for the degree to which that idea is established, to which it wears an air of automatic truth. Cinema is a language with a history and that history is the process of the construction of its narrative forms. From Méliès to Griffith (did he not appeal precisely to the authority of Dickens?) and beyond is traced the groping but sure progress to narrative/cinematic maturity. If pause is made on, say, Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* it is in so far as it represents an 'advance' in narrative technique by its use of cutting and of contrasting scenes. In short, one might say that the history of cinema is the history of the revelation – the full realisation – of its kinship with the novel: 'the deepest relationship between novel and film is that the one and the other are narratives' (Magny, p 30).

It seems clear that that history is true, but it remains to determine the nature of that truth and the truth of the effects of that history. To put it another way, can that history be true for a semiology?

The effects are evident: 'The total rejection of a story, and the accompanying denial of syntax or arrangement, can only lead to the *breakdown of cinematic form*' (Lawson, p 289, my emphasis). That formulation can be made to provide a critical ambiguity in its straight equation of 'story' and 'syntax' or 'arrangement'. The absence of all montage (in the widest sense of the term – 'the concerted organisation of syntagmatic co-occurrences . . . this play of co-presences can be realised both by means of joining together pieces of film and by means of camera movements, or even by "static implication" (= simultaneous presence of two or more

motifs within a single fixed field)' (ESC, II, p 95), might well perhaps be seen as the breakdown of cinematic form (if that concept be accepted), but how far is montage necessarily equivalent to story? Certainly, it would be possible to give a definition of narrative so extensive as to include any sequence; there is something of a 'fatality' of narrative in the sense described by Robbe-Grillet in his account of the serial composition of *L'Eden et après*:

The film was constructed not on the binary structure reality/imagination seen by certain critics, but on the basis of twelve themes, each of which was reproduced in ten series (five long series and, within them, five short ones) a little like the twelve sounds of the scale used in dodecaphonic music, though with this difference nevertheless that when two themes are placed alongside one another they begin to produce anecdotal sense, where two notes engender no anecdote whatever . . . (Robbe-Grillet, p 205).

Yet in practice it is not this kind of extension that is in question; the use of the idea of narrative is precisely in connection with 'story' and is understood in relation to the model provided by the novel.

What is at stake in the reference to this model in the development of cinema and the history of that development (which tells a truth, but uncritically, from within a complicit set of assumptions) is the *instrumentisation* of the particular signifying practice – the 'language' – of cinema. The primacy of narrative is the absence of cinema as no more than technique, the vehicle of narrative the naturalisation of which firmly grounds cinema in a triumphant realism, in the illusion of reality. 'When the bourgeoisie had to find something else besides painting and the novel to disguise the real to the masses, that is, to invent the ideology of the new mass communications, it was called the photograph' (Goddard, p 14). The cinema is a bigger and better version of the photograph, better because moving – narrative truth so many times a second.

If ever a particular element has been generally regarded in traditional thinking as the essence of cinema, then doubtless that element is *movement*:

What has the film-maker to correspond to the colour and visual design of the painter, the solid masses of the sculptor, the musical sounds of the composer, and the word sounds and stresses of the writer and poet? Undoubtedly, the answer to this question is, *movement* (Lindgren, p 92).

It is exactly here that the complex tightens: cinema = (arrangement, montage) = narrative; cinema = movement; therefore movement = narrative; therefore essence of cinema = narrative; and so on.

It was noted earlier how Metz depends on a crucial reference to

24 narrative – 'it is in one and the same movement that cinema made itself narrative and that it gained some of the attributes of a language' (ESC, I, p 99) – and how the analysis of the '*grande syntagmatique*' saves his semiology at an initial stage from the difficulties encountered in the application of the idea of *langue*. In fact, Metz defines that analysis as the study of the procedures of *denotation* in film (as opposed to the layers of connotation which then cover this stratum, providing 'richness', an area, finally, of 'style'). Specificity, narrative and denotation become one unity: 'it is *first of all* by virtue of its procedures of denotation that the cinema is a specific language' (ESC, I, p 100). What the cinema might have of a *langue* is available here and thus, while characterising the '*grande syntagmatique*' as a rhetoric (code for the utilisation of a *langue*), Metz simultaneously offers it as a syntax (system of a *langue*), as having, therefore, by implication, a generality that tends to refine the traditional cinema-narrative conception.

There can be no question here of playing down the delicacy of Metz's treatment of the '*grande syntagmatique*', of ignoring the fact of the care of his discussion of the rhetoric/syntax problem, of his recognition of the partiality of his model (as, for instance, in his discussion of the sequence in *Pierrot le Fou* in which Karina and Belmondo escape from Paris; ESC, I, p 213), of his decisive later comments on the '*grande syntagmatique*' as representing the elucidation of *one of the cinematic codes*, 'that which organises the most usual spatio-temporal logic within the sequence' (Metz (c), p 379). Simply, it needs to be considered to what extent this focus on narrative does not create some kind of norm and if so to what extent that norm is semiologically, as opposed to historically, valid or how those two might be articulated together. Does a semiology as 'theory of the film-novel' (ESC, II, p 12) continue certain complicities? What is involved in a different semiology 'outside' that area (in terms both of films and constructions)? In some sense, the development of Metz's semiology, its shifts of emphasis, is the beginning of an answer.

\* \* \*

Absent from Metz's work is any theory of the subject. Once again, it is possible to detect in this a traditional effect of the focus on narrative. In the history of cinema that that focus sustains, the pattern of development is the liberation of the camera in the interests of narrative – development of close-up, deep focus, increased mobility to follow characters, etc – in the interests, that is, of Reality. The subject is then Reality; Reality speaks. Alternatively (in fact, at the same time – it is a question of the (re-)production of an imaginary that contains the two interdependently), the liberation of the camera is the evolution of its instrumental perfection (Balzac could declare an exactly similar view towards language); constructed to reproduce the centrality of the subject as punctual

source (Baudry, pp 1-8), it is given more and more as the point of his expression: the subject-Author expresses himself. 25

Despite the hesitant renewal with expressivity and illusion of reality in his first writings, Metz's work does overall suggest a different problematic (*Langage et Cinéma* is explicit at points). Yet the problem of the subject remains to be effectively posed. Disappointing in this respect is the limited development received by the notion of filmic writing and the often unhelpful formulations concerning the idea of the textual system. Although the former is defined in terms of an operation (series of 'choices' as opposed to 'invention' or 'creation'), it results in a block – the singular system – that is on the edge of falling back into the organicism (with its attendant unified subject, Reality or individual) that Metz's whole stress on codes, his very semiology, seeks to combat. What seems to be needed is some extension of the notion of filmic writing to take account of cinema as signifying practice, thinking the text in its multiple contradictions and the relation of the subject to sense in that process.

\* \* \*

There is hardly a page of *Langage et Cinéma* that does not contain some use of the term 'specificity'. Without doubt, it is crucial to disengage and analyse the specific codes at work in film and to determine its specific combination of codes. At the same time, however, though one hesitates to say this, so concerned is Metz in places to caution against it, 'specificity' can seem to be the point of a certain, potentially damaging, fixation, to acquire even a certain mythical quality, to appeal to something like an 'essence' of film. In this, it is similar to the notion of 'literarity', introduced by the Russian Formalists and since become central to various structural poetics, and is to this extent open to the same kinds of criticism as have been directed against that notion (cf Derrida, pp 94-95); capable of avoiding a series of reductions and of sustaining reflection at the level of formal – semiological – analysis, 'specificity' can itself also function in turn as a reduction, blocking analysis in an essence that refuses the articulation of the particular practice within/against other areas of theoretical-practical activity. It appears that again the development of the idea of filmic writing will be of great importance in this respect.

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Metz's semiology is to be descriptive not normative (LC, pp 65-66). Already it has been possible to note elements in his work that do, however, hold a normative complicity (narrative, specificity). More generally, the very distinction descriptive/normative is worth attention: is that distinction adequate to a real understanding of theoretical activity? Would it not be less ideologically complacent to think in terms of the process of semiology as critical science emphasised by Julia Kristeva, a practice per-

26 petually displacing itself and its object in a theoretical activity that operates a ceaseless destruction of the whole ideology of representation-description (Kristeva, p 32)? The whole question of this distinction is raised by the *Cinéthique* group in their paper on *Langage et Cinéma*.

In some sense, the problem is that of the limits a particular semiology gives itself. The elaboration of a semiology of film cannot, finally, be conceived simply as the development of a 'knowledge' limited to a singular and autonomous object of study. This is agreed by Metz to the degree to which he characterises film semiology as the *total* study of the filmic fact. Certainly, it may be necessary at a given stage in the process of the elaboration of such a semiology to limit sharply the focus of attention – this is notably and validly the case in Metz's definition of his work as the study of cinematic language – but this limitation is itself, ineluctably, in the problem it raises, a focus of attention and critical interrogation – again, this can be seen in the way in which the question of specificity, the very point at which his limitation operates, must become a crucial area of reflection and argument – and is ceaselessly transgressed in so far as a semiology dealing with the particular cultural practice of film inevitably encounters, in its disengagement of codes, other semiologies, encounters, in fact, the general enterprise of semiology as analysis of forms of social practice grasped as signifying systems, analysis that poses a theoretical reflection on the process(es) of signification and through that on the functioning of sense and its subject.

The (re-)insertion of semiology of film in this wider perspective of semiology as critical science does not – need it be said? – imply the discovery of some 'total discourse' (Metz's term) of the type spun out week after week by a film criticism that is written by the ideology whose film it sells, but its articulation on a series of problems the setting in position of which works back at the level of the particular semiology on the conception at once of its object and of its own discourse, producing it in a fundamental gesture of auto-reflexivity. The criticisms formulated against *Langage et Cinéma* by the *Cinéthique* paper are in part directed at a refusal by Metz to follow through the implications of this reinsertion and the consequent blocking of his semiology in the opposition descriptive/normative, an opposition that determines an 'inability' to think the relations of the signifying practice of film and ideology and the question of the rôle of semiology in ideology.

\* \* \*

It was seen earlier (section VII) that the activity of filmic writing is sometimes described by Metz as one of displacement. The concept of filmic writing as displacement might provide a way of formulating a radical practice of film in terms of *deconstruction* and *writing* in the strong, theoretically reflexive, sense that term finds in contemporary French theory. At the same time, it indicates

the necessity of the analysis of those configurations fixed in ideology that the bulk of films repeat with a minimum of 'displacement', the necessity, in other words, for the analysis in cinema of writings in the sense given that term by Barthes in *Le degré zéro de l'écriture* (Writing Degree Zero), sociolects, relations between creation and society which provide the institution of social meanings, that stifling logic which *oblige* the film to do this or that. Is it not precisely such a writing that Metz describes in the '*grande syntagmatique*', that organisation of 'the most usual spatio-temporal logic', guarantee according to its naturalised *vraisemblable* of the impression of reality?

\* \* \*

Metz's semiology aims at the description of cinematic language. Perhaps what now needs to be attempted by others is the development of a relatively supple analysis capable of taking Metz's work and using his insights and problems to break open films without running back into a specificity. An attention to writings would be one way of beginning this, the working out semiologically of the activity of particular films (the discussion of the notion of filmic writing) another. More than ever there seems to be a need to make new intersections, to split films differently, to push them outside the *auteur* but also outside genre; there are a whole set of continuities and discontinuities that have to be rethought, remade.

I told Aleksandrov, one of Eisenstein's collaborators, that E Shub wanted to film Russian life without any *mise-en-scène* and that with the aim of showing an authentic izba she would not film it in the studio but simply cut an actual izba in two. To which Aleksandrov replied: 'It will be a good thing if she also shows when the izba is being sawn in half'. In saying this he was introducing into the very presentation of the real material, the moment of the play of the preparation of that material (Shklovsky, p 56)

The anecdote, to which some elements of *Tout va Bien* might seem a modern response, gives the measure of a cinema willing to think the reality of its practice and not merely the illusion of reality. It could be said that semiology is another way of cutting the izba in two, the end of 'innocence', not a criticism but a critical analysis of the signifying practice of cinema. The beginning of the development of this is the value and the importance of Metz's work for discussion.

#### Notes

1. See 'Metz's Semiology: A Short Glossary' in *Screen* v 14 n 1/2, Spring/Summer 1973, pp 214-226.
2. See C Metz, 'Current Problems in Film Theory', translated in *Screen* v 14 n 1/2, Spring/Summer 1973, pp 40-87.
3. See Umberto Eco, 'Towards a Semiotic Enquiry into the Television Message', *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* No 3, pp 103-121.



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**Ben Brewster**

The following article is an examination of Metz's concept of a 'singular textual system' in relation to the important analysis of John Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln* produced by the editorial committee of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and published in *Screen* v 13 n 3. Its starting-point is the now notorious observation that film is a polysemic medium with a number of different bands ('purports of expression' to use Hjelmslev's term) and an indefinite number of codes (denotative and connotative) in each band. Whereas Metz has confined most of his attention to the elucidation of these codes one by one, concentrating on the specifically cinematic ones, their very multiplicity in every specific film text raises the problem of the establishment of what in the text can be construed as defining its specificity, ie, the problem of pertinence. The article is a revised version of a paper presented at a BFI/SEFT seminar in May 1973 and has benefited greatly from the discussion at that seminar.

The editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma* begin their study of *Young Mr Lincoln* by claiming that their aim is to make a 'reading' of it as an example of:

a certain number of 'classic' films which today are *readable* . . . insofar as we can distinguish the historicity of their inscription: the relation of these films to the codes (social, cultural . . .) for which they are a site of intersection, and to other films, themselves held in an inter-textual space: therefore, the relation of these films to the ideology which they convey, a particular 'phase' which they represent, and to the events (present, past, historical, mythical, fictional) which they aimed to represent.<sup>1</sup>

This reading or rescanning is not a commentary, an interpretation, a mechanistic structural analysis or a demystification. The intention of this 'active reading' is to make the film say what it has to say in what it leaves unsaid, to reveal its 'structuring absences'.<sup>2</sup> This last theme I shall return to later in this paper: for the moment I want to discuss the problems of the notion of reading in general and of an 'active' reading in particular. If it is clearly quite different from the interpretation which discovers a universal essence behind the phenomenal surface of the work and the mechanical structuralism that deconstructs the work into its elements once and for all, it is not so clear what distinguishes a reading which forces the text from the commentary which restates its meaning in an arbitrarily determined manner.

The use of 'text' and 'reading' for a form of utterance which is not a page written or printed in ink refers to the customary semiological and semiotic practice of designating as such any

30 corpus of utterances, whatever the codes and purport of expression combined in its production. For the purposes of isolating many codes, the nature of the corpus, the limits of the text, are irrelevant, once the text attains a certain minimum length, but the use of the term 'text' to describe *Young Mr Lincoln* implies something more – the notion of this particular segment of the possible corpora inside it and beyond it. 'Text' here implies a unique corpus, and semiological discussion of it is a discussion of its unique properties, the 'singular textual system' that corresponds to it theoretically.<sup>3</sup> A 'reading' of a 'text' goes beyond a knowledge of the codes set to work in it and required to decipher it, it implies how these codes have been set to work in this particular message. A third point to note about the use of 'text' is the polemical aspect the word has acquired recently, opposing a linguistics and semiotics too closely bound to oral language at the expense of non-oral sign systems, and to the denotative aspect of language as opposed to all other aspects. Such theories remain restricted to the problematic of the sign conceived simply as a signifier standing for a signified, reducing language to a technical means for conveying information from one speaking subject to another. An emphasis on the text, on the contrary, though assuming that art works are acts of communication, emphasises the non-denotative aspects and the multiplicity of codes and systems operative in any utterance, and especially the effects of the interaction of codes within a text, and hence the effect of different texts on one another.<sup>4</sup> As we shall see, these factors all emphasise 'aesthetic' or 'artistic' aspects of the text, and hence are of crucial importance in the discussion of artistic texts.

However, in no sense does 'Young Mr Lincoln' offer us a breakdown of the various codes at work in the film and a formalised description of their use: it is neither like Metz's analysis of *Adieu Philippine*, which examines one of the cinematic codes as it functions in one film (in this case the 'broad syntagmatics of the film'),<sup>5</sup> nor is it like Bellour's analysis of one sequence from *The Birds*, which isolates as pertinent three codes (scale of shot/camera movement/the gaze) in the singular text of the segment itself.<sup>6</sup> At first sight all that marks 'Young Mr Lincoln' off from the ordinary commentary is the precision of its sequence-by-sequence account of what happens in the film. It is a 'reading' in the sense that as an account it is like the experience of the audience watching (reading) the film, or of the scenarist, director and editor making (writing) the film. Hence the introduction of semiological terminology does not as such differentiate the *Cahiers* 'reading' from any ordinary commentary.

If a commentary is an arbitrary reading, a 'reading' in the sense of the authors must be a *pertinent* reading. It is obvious that any number of 'readings' could be (and are) given of *Young Mr Lincoln* which are legitimate, ie, can justify themselves in relation

to their specific ends – the film could be read for its historical ‘accuracy’ (in a certain ideology of history) by a history teacher, for its sexual morality and attitude to crime by a censor, for the likely political effect of showing it in a certain conjuncture by a political activist, etc. But if it is true that there is some way of reading this film text which is pertinent for the poetician of film, this must lie in the object of film poetics, ie, in this case, in the film itself; there must be a reading implicit in the text, or its unique context, and hence something that Paul Willemen has called the ‘implicit reader’.

A first approach to this problem that immediately suggests itself is the codes. A code implies a reader who understands the code. A text in French implies a reader of French. But the notion of code used in cinema needs closer examination. According to Metz: ‘If a code is a code, it is because it offers a unitary area of commutations, that is, a (reconstructed) ‘sector’ within which variations of the signifier correspond to variations of the signified, within which a certain number of units acquire their meaning in their relations to one another.’ Codes are the general systems of the cinema as opposed to the singular system of the text, while sub-codes are restricted to classes of film, but remain general with respect to individual film-texts. However, as Stephen Heath has pointed out, the above definition may be too restrictive, ‘the essence of the notion of “code” may lie less on the process of signification, the relation of signifier and signified, than on its definition of a system of constraints, or, to put it another way, of a system of possibilities, of choices.’<sup>8</sup> To take an example, any set of mutually exclusively sub-codes constitutes a paradigm (a paradigm is precisely a system of elements only one of which can be present in the same point in the signifying chain), to be precise a *connotator*. Thus black-and-white is part of the paradigm of colour-process in general (other members are: sepia, colour – the latter being sub-divided into different colour processes, etc.). By the Metz-Heath definition, this connotator constitutes a code, even though it would be difficult to apply a commutative text to this code unequivocally (black-and-white may connote documentary, but it may also connote art-movie, or nothing in particular).

According to structuralist linguistics, although a paradigm is defined by the impossibility of co-presence of its elements, these elements must all appear somewhere in the totality of the texts to which the code is applicable. Metz argues that the codes are syntagmatic as well as paradigmatic,<sup>9</sup> but his syntagmatic codes, notably the broad syntagmatics of the film, seem to me to constitute paradigms at a different morphological level: thus the ordinary sequence excludes the episodic sequence, the scene, the descriptive sequence etc. Hence they too are subject to the rule of presence elsewhere. Chomsky argues against structuralist linguistics that his ‘models of competence’ are generative procedures

32 independent of any text, and thus that the rule of presence elsewhere is not an essential feature of syntactic structures. However, whatever the results of this quarrel about natural languages, it is doubtful to what extent it will help the semiologist of film faced with the problem under discussion here, for nearly all the problems of the semiology of the cinema fall under the head of 'models of performance' in a Chomskyan schema; only the natural language constituent of the film text, the dialogue, commentary and titles contain the sentence structures to which a Chomskyan 'model of competence' would apply.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the same goes for the study even of linguistic artistic texts, for the artistic qualities of a text are derived from what Lotman calls the 'secondary modelling systems'<sup>11</sup> affecting the primary natural language chain. It should also be noted that whereas the paradigms of natural language are quite limited and highly structured – thus, according to Jakobson and Halle, twelve oppositions of distinctive features will account for the phonological systems of all known natural languages<sup>12</sup> – those of the secondary modelling systems are indefinite and loosely structured: the connotator of the different colour systems is open-ended, depending only on the ability to perceive differences in colour range and balance. Hence whereas the full paradigm of phonemes will appear in quite a brief natural-language text, for many of the secondary modelling systems, a large number of individual film-texts are required to exhaust the paradigm, and indeed, all film-texts so far produced have not exhausted all existing paradigms. As the paradigm changes over time, the significance of the presence of one of its elements changes: the presence of black-and-white in a film of the 1920's has a different connotation from that of the same in one of the 1970's.

In reconstructing the codes governing a text, and therefore implied for a reading of it, do we define the codes in relation to a set of texts defined by a date-line, ie, all the film-texts produced before this film-text? By this standard the existence of the first colour film fundamentally alters the code of colour connotations. But we know that this is not the case. Black-and-white films were still made in much the same way both before and after the first commercial colour films. Colour is, of course, a technical process, and hence the 'first time' colour was used is subject to all the problems discussed by Comolli in his articles on "Technique and Ideology" in *Cahiers du Cinéma* nos 229-231, 233, 235 and 241. The 'first time' it was used is remarkably hard to pin down. Colour films existed virtually in almost every respect in the early 1900's: the notion of colour photography was familiar, tinted film gave a foretaste of full colour reproduction, certain technical processes were available, etc. All that prevented the implementation until the first commercially released colour film (*Sky Symphonies* 1932) was a complex of technical, ideological and economic factors which mean that the techniques available were so expensive and

the demand for colour too small to make the exploitation of these techniques profitable. But this virtual existence, existence but absence, is precisely characteristic of the elements of a paradigm. Hence the paradigm of colour could be said to include colour before any colour films had been made. On the other hand, long after its first commercial applications, colour filming remained costly and difficult, and hence was restricted to big budget pictures. Only in the last decade and a half has it become the standard process, black and white the special one. A glance at a series of films that contain sequences both in black and white and in colour will show clearly the change in the paradigm. In *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), the colour sequences (the heroine's dream) are super-real, super-natural, as opposed to the humdrum waking world of black and white. In *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956), where, to the horror of the narrator, the pre-credits sequence is in black and white and non-scope, a state of affairs quickly rectified, black and white clearly connotes cheap production values. In *Shonen* (1969) the variation between black and white and colour has no commutative value. Thus for this secondary modelling system, the text constituting the paradigmatic set of elements in the code cannot be regarded as a level plain of previous texts: extra-textual circumstances distort its surface and certain texts impose themselves like mountains in this plain.<sup>13</sup> Of course, a connotator is a special case in that it refers to relatively long textual segments (whole films or at least sequences) and has the simplest of syntaxes; moreover, colour is a technical question in the strict sense. But all the same arguments apply to more strictly 'aesthetic' codes, for example, to what is probably the best studied cinematic code, Metz's 'broad syntagmatics of the film'.

Hence *in themselves* the cinematic codes implied in the film text are not capable of producing an unambiguous reader who would be able to provide an objective reading of a film text. Indeed, the argument thus far seems to have destroyed any stable notion of cinematic codes or secondary modelling systems in artistic texts of any kind that could provide the means of an objective analysis of any kind. However, when we turn from the codes themselves to the singular textual system, ie, to the application of the codes in a single film text, the ambiguity inherent in a secondary modelling system can be drastically reduced by the simple procedure of *doubling* (or *trebling*, *quadrupling* . . . ) that code or system. Thus black and white, even today, or especially today, connotes very little as such, but black and white, high grain and the wobbly motion characteristic of the hand-held camera clearly connotes newsreel. To refer to an authority perhaps unexpected in this theoretical context (a tentative explanation for this convergence will be offered below), this procedure seems to correspond to what Lukács calls 'double mimesis' in the cinema.<sup>14</sup> His example is the debut of Kane's second wife in *Citizen Kane*: a long vertical pan

34 through the flies takes us from the singer on the stage to two technicians who give a thumbs-down sign. Thus the bad singing of Kane's wife is conveyed to the audience firstly by means of the aural codes of opera-singing and the singer's failure to conform to them; then by the visual code of sign language, the thumbs-down sign. A rule might be formulated to the effect that no pertinent element of the singular textual system is not at least doubly marked in this way (which implies that codes can also be *neutralised* by not re-marking them: thus black-and-white is of no pertinence if not paralleled by some other confirming code). In the 'classical' American sound cinema, the most frequent re-marking is a verbal doubling of the visual register by the sound register of dialogue or narration, or by written titles. It is very rare indeed for something significant shown not to be said, too. But, as Lukács's example shows, the doubling need not be of the visual/verbal type. In *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, the hero reads a letter from his unrecognised admirer and lover on the eve of fighting a duel; his antagonist in the duel is his lover's husband. We are never told this in the dialogue, and we only catch one glimpse of this antagonist in his coach before the duel at the end of the film. But this visual recognition is in fact doubled by the code of the plot: the husband is destined for the role (there is also a non-codic mark in an association established between the coach and the husband throughout the film).

This codic doubling is by no means an unfamiliar phenomenon. It is what is known in linguistics as *motivation*. To take the classic example of the motivated sign, in the onomatopoeia the conventional symbolic lexeme is doubled by an element from an iconic code sounding like the thing signified. 'Cuckoo' is the word for (the call of) *Cuculus canorus*. It is an element of the lexical paradigm of names of bird, a paradigm which includes unmotivated elements like 'thrush' or differently motivated ones like 'black-bird', but at the same time it is 'like' the call of the bird according to an iconic convention (code). If I am right that 'double mimesis' is a form of motivation, then Lukács's presence here is explicable, for it is a classical definition of aesthetic discourse that it consists of natural as opposed to arbitrary signs, and natural signs are in fact motivated signs in the terms of modern linguistics.<sup>15</sup> However, a little more needs to be said here. The parallel doubling of a piece of information conveyed by one code by the same information conveyed by another is also a kind of semantic redundancy. It might well be said that the technicians have to give their thumbs-down in *Citizen Kane* for the benefit of the more benighted members of the audience who can't tell a good opera singer from a bad one merely by listening to her. Accumulation of motivation enables the cinema to overcome inherent limitations of the medium, or 'potential contradictions between the codes. Information is conveyed in another code, because, for some reason

it cannot be so conveyed in the most obvious manner. The American *film noir* is usually in black-and-white (the obvious exception is Dwan's *Slightly Scarlet*), for one of its possible connotations; on the other hand, red-headed girls are significant feature of its generic code (presumably deriving from a literary source). The red hair has to be conveyed in the dialogue band, not in the visual band. However, the red-headedness is motivated here too, being part both of the dialogue-band and conveyed by the generic convention itself. This parallel motivation may be given the description 'realist', for it is by no means a trivial definition of realism that it obtains its verisimilitude simply by repeating its information as many times as possible.<sup>16</sup> There is also an inverse motivation, where one code contradicts another, most easily exemplified by the interaction of rhythm and natural stress in the poetic line. In the line with parallel motivation the natural-language rhythm of the words doubles the rhythm of the line. In the line with inverse motivation, in some words the two rhythmic codes clash, such that in an oral rendering the stress patterns either of natural language or of the line have to be distorted, producing a particular (re)mark.<sup>17</sup> Thirdly there is an intermediate motivation which might be called lateral, and characterised by the denial of motivation in the expected band and its substitution in another. The examples from Welles and Ophuls, particularly the latter, are characteristic of this lateral motivation.<sup>18</sup>

Thus in my investigation of the notion of an implicit reader, it is clear that the codes themselves are too indefinite in film and secondary modelling systems in general to define such a reader, but that the motivation of the singular film text marks the pertinent codes, and indeed often first provides these signifying systems with a signified. Lastly, I should turn from the codes and the text to the act of communication itself. The implicit reader is an ideal reader, one who completely conforms to the supposed intentions of the text. Lotman, however, has examined the effects of discrepancy between the text and its (concrete) reader, in particular the cases of correspondence or non-correspondence between the codes employed in the production of a text and those used in its decipherment. He notes:

Between understanding and not understanding an artistic text there is clearly a quite extensive intermediate space . . . Here we must look somewhat more closely at a distinction in principle between natural languages and secondary modelling systems of an artistic type. In linguistic literature Roman Jakobson's thesis that the rules of grammatical synthesis (the grammar of the emitter) must be differentiated from the grammar of analysis (the grammar of the receiver) has received due recognition. An analogous investigation of artistic communication reveals its considerable complexity. For in this case it turns out that in a whole series the receiver of a



- 36 text not only has to decipher the message with the help of a determinate code, but must also establish in what 'language' the text has been coded. The following cases have to be distinguished:
- I. (a) Receiver and emitter use a common code – community of artistic language is unconditionally implied, at most the message is new . . . (b) A variant of this case is the reception today of texts made en masse according to stereotypes. Here too there is a common code for the emitter and the receiver of the text. But whereas in the first case this was the precondition for artistic communication and was also emphasised as such in every way, the author is concerned in the second case to conceal this fact . . .
- II. Another case exists, when the hearer attempts to decipher the text and in doing so uses a different code from the producer of the text. Here, too, two types of relations are possible:
- (a) The receiver forces his own artistic language on the text . . .
- (b) The receiver attempts to receive the text according to rules already known to him but is convinced by the application of the method of trial and error of the necessity to generate a new code, as yet unknown to him. A series of interesting processes take place thereby. The receiver begins a struggle with the language of the emitter and can be conquered in this struggle: the writer forces his language on the reader, who appropriates it . . . In practice, however, the language of the writer is more often deformed in the process of appropriation, submitted to a creolisation with languages which already exist in the arsenal of the reader's consciousness . . .
- A further case is also interesting: the relation between the accidental and the systematic may mean something different for the emitter and the receiver in the artistic text. In his reception of some artistic message, for the text of which a deciphering code still needs to be worked out, the receiver constructs a determinate model. In the process systems may arise that organise accidental parts of the text and thereby give them significance. Thus in the transition from emitter to receiver the number of structural elements containing significance increases. This is an aspect of that highly complex and hitherto hardly examined phenomenon, ie, the capacity for the artistic text to accumulate information.<sup>19</sup>

As Lotman goes on to show, this 'accumulation of information' in the text by an interaction of different coding and decoding systems is more common and significant than this formulation might suggest. It follows that the critical approach to a text is a *reading* in that it both utilises the codes it has in common with the producer of the text and produces new codes that may or may not have gone into the production of the text with the proviso that the 'reading in' of codes is not arbitrary, because it is governed by a rule of pertinence established by the motivations, ie, multiple codings, that the reading can establish in the text. The authors of 'Young Mr Lincoln' are right to insist that 'we do not

hesitate to force the text, even to rewrite it, insofar as the film only constitutes itself as a text by integration of the reader's knowledge'.<sup>20</sup>

In the editorial of *Cahiers du Cinéma* nos 216-7, Oct-Nov 1969, a classification of film texts was produced, the fifth class of which was defined as follows:

Films which seem at first sight to belong firmly within the ideology and to be completely under its sway, but which turn out to be so only in an ambiguous manner. For though they start from a non-progressive standpoint, ranging from the frankly reactionary through the conciliatory to the mildly critical, they have been worked upon, and work, in such a real way that there is a noticeable gap, a dislocation, between the starting point and the finished product . . . An internal criticism is taking place which cracks the film apart at the seams. If one reads the film obliquely, looking for symptoms; if one looks beyond its apparent formal coherence, one can see that it is riddled with cracks: it is splitting under an internal tension which is simply not there in an ideologically innocuous film. The ideology thus becomes subordinate to the text. It no longer has an independent existence: it is *presented* by the film . . . (The films of Ford, Dreyer, Rossellini, for example).<sup>21</sup>

The analysis of *Young Mr Lincoln* is one of a series of texts following up this definition of a class of films. The reading of the film uncovers such 'cracks' in the form of the inverse motivations discussed above: to be specific, between the generic framework of the film, particular fictional sub-codes applied, and the Fordian authorial sub-code. The genre is that of the 'early life of the great man', not conceived of as an education for his later life, but as an anecdotal revelation of his pre-adaptation for the role he is later to play. Other examples that come to mind are the early parts of Griffith's *Abraham Lincoln* and Gance's *Napoleon*. Such a genre tends to convey a reactionary message because it naturalises the hero's later actions; they are already present in him *ab initio*, and can be revealed in anticipation in apparently trivial incidents, in the manner of patristic figural interpretation of the Old Testament as prefiguring the New. The *Cahiers* critics go on to remark that since the future events are *only* prefigured in *Young Mr Lincoln*, which does not, like the other two films mentioned, go on to any of the confirmations of these prefigurations (even Gance includes Napoleon's Italian campaign), what is prefigured can be selected in such a way as to appropriate Lincoln's historical importance while ignoring what he is historically important for: prosecuting the Union side, ie progressive capitalist side in the Civil War and emancipating the slaves (capitalist reform in the South). Thus the film sets out to present Lincoln as the great reconciler, the friend of the South and the Western farmer, the saviour of the Union.

38 However, the generic code is contradicted by two other factors: the detective-story plot superimposed on the 'early life' theme, with its epistemological problematic of the relation between seeing, interpreting and knowing, which makes Lincoln ambiguously the bringer of the truth and the involuntary puppet of the truth (the almanac), and the Fordian sub-code, implying the duplication of mother representing the truth of the community and hero- 'son' implementing the community by transgression, which is here forced to fuse the two in Lincoln himself as vehicle and executive of the truth, achieved by the identification of Lincoln with his dead mother and dead ideal wife. These two codes are clearly in parallel motivation, but inversely motivate the generic code, depriving Lincoln of precisely the power to determine the future events that the depicted events should prefigure, in some sense destroying his verisimilitude as the great American reconciler, and in fact turning him into a kind of monster.

As the authors point out, this deciphering implies the application of a code which was not, almost certainly, knowingly used by Ford in the encoding: a psycho-analytic decipherment.<sup>22</sup> Here psycho-analytic concepts are employed as a code, which is only part of their role in analysis itself; this is a case of what Freud called 'applied psycho-analysis' and can only provide corroborative evidence for analytic concepts, not direct scientific evidence. Analytic decoding is notoriously ambiguous in the absence of the resistance of the analytical patient as a confirmation of successful interpretation; here, however, this ambiguous signifier acquires its signified precisely as do other cinematic and non-cinematic codes — by its motivation in parallel with the detective-story code and the Fordian code, inversely with respect to the 'early life of the hero' generic code. This is precisely a case of 'accumulation of information' in the sense defined by Lotman.

At this point, two points of criticism should be made. In one sense, these are no more than notes such as Peter Wollen made in his 'Afterword' to 'Young Mr Lincoln' in *Screen*,<sup>23</sup> but they do have some important consequences.

1. The political analyses in paragraphs (3) and (4) seem misconceived: they posit a highly specific aim on the part of the producers of the film which is unsubstantiated, and indeed could not be substantiated, presented as it is in the form of a pure will. If the film is propaganda for the Republican candidate in the 1940 presidential elections, this, and its efficacy as such propaganda, could only be determined in relation to the election campaign, to some texts, in fact, not to Zanuck's intentions. And in fact, after its initial mention, this specific ideological purpose is ignored from then on in favour of the more general one of the 'reformulation of the historical figure of Lincoln on the level of myth and the eternal'<sup>24</sup> which I have already discussed. Moreover, references to 'topical themes' of the day are made on several occasions: to

lynching for example. These need more analysis. For if I am not mistaken, most 1930's lynchings were of blacks, whereas in films about the theme they are usually of whites at this period (eg, *Fury*). If I am right about this denegation (inspired by a wish to keep the colour problem off the screen?), then the lynching theme in *Young Mr Lincoln* becomes another covert reference to the theme of emancipation. In the 1950's when the colour problem was the order of the day for Hollywood, blacks are frequently, if not almost exclusively the intended victims, and in Ford's own *The Sun Shines Bright*, Judge Priest saves a black from lynching in a way similar to that used by Lincoln, though his castration has become much more pathetic, without the monstrous Gorgonic petrifying power of Lincoln's in *Young Mr Lincoln*. But these comments remain impressionistic. To integrate ideological themes such as these into film analysis much more sophisticated analyses of these themes and the codes they employ and represent are required than are provided in 'Young Mr Lincoln'.

2. More important, I am dubious of the importance that the authors attribute to the 'future anterior' structure and its ability to separate Lincoln from his true historical role while appropriating the glory due to him because of that role. Griffith's *Abraham Lincoln* takes Lincoln's story right through to his assassination, dealing with the Civil War and expressly including the Emancipation declaration of September 1862. Yet the ideology is hardly dissimilar and Griffith's pro-Southern, anti-black prejudices are notorious. It seems to me that the authors have been partly led astray here by Marx himself. The citation at the beginning of 'Young Mr Lincoln' from an article by Marx in the Vienna paper *Die Presse*, October 12th 1862, is of great interest here, because its primary concern is with Lincoln's *verisimilitude*. This is made very clear by quoting another paragraph from it:

There is nothing easier than to hunt up traits in the things Lincoln does that are at variance with aesthetics, and seem to lack logic, have the jester form, and contradictions in viewpoint, as do the English Pindars of slavery – *The Times*, *The Saturday Review* and *tutti quanti*. And yet, in the history of the United States and in the history of humanity, Lincoln occupies a place beside Washington! Truly in our day, when every little happening on this side of the Atlantic Ocean assumes an air of melodramatic portent, is there no meaning in the fact that everything of significance taking shape in the New World makes its appearance in such everyday form?<sup>25</sup>

Thus Lincoln lacks *verisimilitude*, but represents a great historical revolution, while Europeans, and no doubt in particular Marx's *bête noire* Louis Bonaparte, are all rhetoric and represent nothing. As a rhetorical formulation this is not incorrect though its implication that universal suffrage can be genuinely representative is one

40 Marx was to reject nine years later after the Commune, but it already contains the elements by which the lack of verisimilitude, signifying the fact that Lincoln is riding a revolutionary wave which is alien to him, can itself become a form of verisimilitude, by antithesis, such that Lincoln is identified with the acts of the class alliance which prosecuted the Civil War from the North. Thus:

It is not our part to call words of sorrow and horror, while the heart of two worlds heaves with emotion. Even the sycophants who, year after year, and day by day, stuck to their Sisyphus work of morally assassinating Abraham Lincoln, and the great republic he headed stand now aghast at this universal outburst of popular feeling, and rival with each other to strew rhetorical flowers on his open grave. They have now at last found out that he was a man, neither to be browbeaten by adversity, nor intoxicated by success, inflexibly pressing on to his great goal, never compromising it by blind haste, slowly maturing his steps, never retracing them, carried away by no surge of popular favour, disheartened by no slackening of the popular pulse; tempering stern acts by the gleams of a kind heart, illuminating scenes of dark with passion by the smile of humour, doing his titanic work as humbly and homely as heaven-born rulers do little things with the grandiloquence of pomp and state; in one word, one of the rare men who succeed in becoming great, without ceasing to be good. Such, indeed, was the modesty of this great and good man, that the world only discovered him a hero after he had fallen a martyr.<sup>26</sup>

This is from the International Working Men's Association's 'Address to President Johnson' published in the *Bee-Hive*, May 20th 1865, and drafted by Marx. Here, the Lincoln myth of both Ford's and Griffith's films is present practically word for word. The function of this myth is not to draw attention away from Lincoln's role in the Civil War ('to save the Union') or emancipation ('to give blacks elementary justice') – on the contrary, both of these, which Lincoln would have avoided if he could, rebound to his credit – but rather to draw attention away from the movement which *pushed* him into adopting these positions as an unwilling leader, and which *did not stop* at his assassination (indeed its most radical proponents made no effort to conceal their pleasure that he was out of the way): the Radical Republican movement, and the Reconstruction of the South, certainly the most revolutionary government and governmental strategy there has ever been in the USA. The ideology of Ford and Griffith, combining Lincoln worship with Southern nostalgia, might be called the ideology of the Hayes-Tilden compromise which ended Reconstruction in 1876. In this connection Ford's *Prisoner of Shark Island* is of great interest, because it is set in the Reconstruction period. But here too the Radical Republican regime is represented solely through the repressive state apparatus, the legal persecution of Dr Mudd, with no

attempt to represent the social bases and consequences of Reconstruction; indeed, a large part of the film takes place on an island off the coast which contains only a prison – a geographical absence of the economic base, as it were. Reconstruction is characterised purely as a divisive, vengeful spirit, as intolerance (another homology with Griffith?).

It follows from these two points that the generic code (the youth of the hero) and its specific ideological motivation in this film text (the ideology of the Hayes-Tilden compromise) are much less specific to the text and probably to the political conjuncture of its production than the *Cahiers* analysis suggests. Inversely, the 'cracks' – the inverse motivations – are due to the interaction of these very broad sub-codes with the Fordian sub-code – the textual system constituted by Ford's films – and hence this system/code is of more importance than the *Cahiers* analysis implies, 'Young Mr Lincoln' thus seems to confirm the intuition, if not the theory and method, of author criticism. The authorial system/code remains a crucial element in the analysis of the American cinema.

#### Notes

1. 'John Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln*. A collective text by the Editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*', translated by Hélène Lackner and Diana Matias, *Screen*, v 13 n 3, Autumn 1972, pp 5-6. In what follows I shall refer to the article as 'Young Mr Lincoln' and to the film as *Young Mr Lincoln*.
2. *Ibid*, p 8.
3. Cf Christian Metz, *Langage et Cinéma*, Larousse, Paris 1971, Ch VI.
4. Cf Peter Wollen's critique of utilitarian theories of language in the post-script to the second edition of *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, Secker and Warburg, London 1973.
5. Christian Metz, *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, t I. Klincksieck, Paris 1971, Ch 7.
6. Raymond Bellour, 'Les Oiseaux de Hitchcock: analyse d'une séquence', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no 216, October 1969, pp 24-38.
7. *Langage et cinéma*, *op cit*, p 20.
8. Stephen Heath, 'The Work of Christian Metz: Notes for an Introduction', in this issue of *Screen*, pp 5-28. Cf all of section V of this essay.
9. 'What is called a code is a logical entity constructed in order to explain and elucidate the functioning of paradigmatic relations in the texts and to explain and elucidate the functioning of syntagmatic relations in these same texts, The code carries in it the intelligibility of the syntagm as well as that of the paradigm, without itself being either paradigm or syntagm'. *Langage et cinéma*, *op cit*, p 122. On the other hand he also says: 'It is impossible to list and identify the syntagmatic types except by putting them themselves into a paradigm, and each one of them cannot be defined except as a syntagmatic combination of paradigmatic classes', *ibid*, p 129.
10. See Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, MIT, Cambridge Mass. 1965, p 9 and Ch I, para 2. Maybe this remark should be more cautiously formulated.
11. By 'language' I shall mean every system of communication that applies ordered signs in a particular way. . . . If language is understood in (this) way, the concept unites:

(a) natural languages (eg, Russian, French, Estonian, Czech);  
 (b) artificial languages: scientific languages (metalanguages of scientific descriptions), languages with conventional signals (eg, traffic signs), etc, etc;

(c) the secondary languages (secondary modelling systems), ie, structures of communication which are constructed over the plane of natural languages (myth, religion). *Art is a secondary modelling system*. 'Secondary in relation to language' does not just mean 'applies a natural language as material'. If the term had this meaning, it would not be justifiable to include non-linguistic arts (painting, music, etc). But the relation is more complex here; natural language is not only one of the earliest, but also the most powerful communications system in the human collective. By its structure it has a powerful influence on man's psyche and in many domains of social life. Secondary modelling systems are (like all semiotic systems) constructed *according to the type of language*. This does not mean that they reproduce *all* the aspects of natural languages. . . . The elaboration of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations in painting, . . . in cinematography (essays by Eisenstein, Tynyanov, Eichenbaum, Metz) makes it possible to treat these arts as *objects of semiotics*, as systems which are constructed according to the type of languages. Since man's consciousness is a linguistic consciousness, all the varieties of models constructed on the basis of consciousness – and art is amongst them – can be defined as secondary modelling systems.

Yury Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (in Russian), Moscow 1970, *cit* according to the German edition; Jurij M Lotman: *Die Struktur des künstlerischen Textes*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1973, pp 20-23.

12. Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, Janua Linguarum, Series Minor no 1, Mouton, The Hague, 1956, revised edition 1971.
13. Hence the demand for a 'monumental history' of the cinema cited by Comolli from *Ciné-Forum* in *Cahiers du Cinéma* no 230, July 1971, p 57.
14. In drafting this article I cited Lukács from memory. On re-reading the text I find his point is somewhat different. The example from *Citizen Kane* is designed to show the subordination of the aural band to the visual band in the sound cinema, Mrs Kane's bad singing being indicated predominantly by her tutor's visually conveyed despair rather than by its aurally conveyed ineptitude. For Lukács, in film, the 'second mimesis' which 're-anthropologises' the initial mechanical record of nature, is all the devices of the cinema – cutting, camera-angles, frames, movements, etc – whose aim is (in the aesthetically good film) to ensure a consistency of 'mood' (*Stimmung*) – a consistency not, of course, denying sudden reversals, etc, so long as they are integrated. As will be seen below, this notion of double mimesis too falls into my concept of motivation. I shall therefore let the reference stand despite its inaccuracy, because the example serves my purposes, which are not Lukács's, and the basic interpretation of his position is not incorrect. See *Ästhetik I, Werke*, vol 12, pp 489-520, esp p 498.
15. See Tzvetan Todorov, 'Esthétique et sémiotique au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Critique* no 308, January 1973, pp 26-39.
16. See Gerard Genette, 'Vraisemblance et motivation' in *Figures II*, Seuil, Paris 1969, pp 71-99.
17. See Roman Jakobson, 'Concluding Statement: Linguistics and Poetics' in Thomas A Sebeok, ed, *Style in Language*, MIT, Cambridge, Mass, 1960, pp 365-7.

18. For the relation between verisimilitude and motivation, see Genette, *op cit*. Genette, incidentally, suggests a modification of the rule proposed above, in that he points out the possibility of a degree-zero of motivation, ie, a motivation by no motivation, hence the possibility of a pertinence obtained precisely by the absence of double marking. The alteration of colour and black and white in *Shonen* mentioned above might constitute a cinematic example, and automatic writing in literary texts.
19. Jurij M Lotman, *op cit*, pp 44-7.
20. 'Young Mr Lincoln', *op cit*, p 37.
21. Translated in *Screen*, v 12 n 1, Spring 1971, pp 32-3.
22. 'But the manifestation of this omnipotence at the end of the film . . . can be read in the following ways: . . . 3. As Lincoln's impotence insofar as he appears subject to the power of the signifier (the almanac) and in a position of radical non-recognition regarding it, such that one can just as well say that the truth revolves around Lincoln, . . . and that it is not Lincoln who uses the signifier to manifest the truth, but the signifier which uses Lincoln as mediator to accede to the status of the sign of truth. . . . 3. (. . . specific to the film's . . . reading . . . ) manifest(s) a distortion of the ideological project by the writing of the film.' 'Young Mr Lincoln', *op cit*, pp 36-7.
23. *Ibid*, pp 44-7.
24. *Ibid*, p 13.
25. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Civil War in the United States*, International Publishers, New York, fourth printing 1969, p 333.
26. *Ibid*, pp 283-4.

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Thierry Kuntzel

# I. Semiotic Preliminaries

## 1. 2 *Cinematic fact and filmic fact*

The important part of the articulation of cinema and ideology which escapes semiotics is that which concerns the *cinematic fact* as opposed to the *filmic fact*, a distinction first made by Gilbert Cohen-Séat<sup>1</sup> and employed by Christian Metz:

film is only a small part of the cinema, for the latter represents a vast ensemble of phenomena some of which intervene *before* the film (the economic infrastructure of production, studios, bank or other financing, national laws, sociology of the context of decision making . . .), others *after* the film (the social, political, and ideological impact of the film on different publics, 'pattern' of behaviour or of sentiment induced by viewing the films, audience responses, audience surveys, mythology of stars, etc.) . . . The importance of making this distinction between the cinematic and the filmic fact is that it allows us to restrict the meaning of the term 'film' to a more manageable, specifiable signifying discourse, in contrast with 'cinema', which, as defined here, constitutes a larger complex.<sup>2</sup>

Semiotic analysis deals with the filmic fact; it 'should restrict itself to the study of film considered as a language'<sup>3</sup>. This limitation of the object is the same as that which is set up by Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics* between *external* and *internal* linguistics: even though the relationships of language to the history of civilisations, political history or institutions (to use a few of Saussure's own examples) are considerable, linguistics must study language as a 'system which knows only its own order'<sup>4</sup>. Though the *before* and the *after* of film do not interest semiotics, one must not think that semiotics removes film from its socio-economic context, for this would render it a non-ideological object: thus we study neither the various pressures of production and distribution nor the ideological impact of film (these external studies being best left to sociologists, economists and psychologists) but the ideological interplay within the filmic fact itself. This brings us back to one of the fundamental principles of semiological

\* This article was originally presented as a paper at the Student Conference on Film Study, Washington, 1973.

The relevancy chosen by semiological research concerns, by definition, the meaning of the analysed objects: we consider the objects solely in relation to their meaning without bringing in, at least not prematurely, that is, not before the system be reconstituted as far as possible, the other determinants (psychological, sociological, or physical) of these objects, we must certainly not deny these other determinants, which each depend upon another relevancy; but we must treat them also in semiological terms, that is, situate their place and function in the system of meaning. . . . The principle of relevancy obviously requires of the analyst a situation of *immanence*, we observe the given system from within.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.2 *Text, code and system*

The filmic fact itself is not a simple phenomenon: its connections with ideology may be studied on the different levels presented by Christian Metz in *Language and Cinema* :

The semiotics of the filmic fact ought to constantly make use of three notions among which it can circulate rapidly and all the time. . . . They are:

1. filmic texts, which may present different degrees of material scope, the privileged one being the single and entire film (= the notion of 'film' in its distributive sense);
2. textual filmic systems, that is to say, filmic systems which correspond to these different texts; and
3. non-textual filmic systems (= codes), which themselves present different degrees of generality (= the distinction between code and sub-codes) and which, according to the individual case, may be cinematic or extra-cinematic; those of them which are cinematic constitute, as a block, the 'cinematic language'.

We could thus summarise the task of the semiotics of the filmic fact as follows: to analyse film texts in order to discover either textual systems, cinematic codes or sub-codes.<sup>6</sup>

It may be noticed that, in this quotation, the meaning of *cinematic* is not the same as that intended by Cohen-Séat: this difference depends on the polysemic use of the word 'cinema' which may indicate, within the total filmic fact, a *specific* zone which cinema does not share with other languages: a zone where an original material of expression is formed by original structures.

To illustrate how the terms distinguished by Metz function within the question of ideology, a filmic text<sup>7</sup> will be chosen: *M*, directed by Fritz Lang in Germany in 1931.

II.1 *M* and criticism: 'symbolic' and 'decoding' methods

Fritz Lang, Germany, 1931. The association of this name, this country and this date creates a sort of 'semantic constellation', which 'overdetermines' from without, the text, and consequently the ideological criticism elaborated about it. Critics research in *M* either Lang's 'eternal' themes (which would recur unchanged from film to film) or the reflection of historical problems particular to the period in which *M* was made.<sup>8</sup> In both cases, there is a deep belief in one meaning – the *true* meaning – of the text, as if the whole signifying process had only one aim: the demonstration of a signified. So *M* is reduced to ideological messages of the following type:

1. relative to Lang's thematic, *M* would be the perfect illustration of the inexorability of fate,<sup>9</sup> the main principle from which secondary principles are derived, for example, 'None of you is innocent, Lang says. None of you is safe. Morality is a process of constant vigilance and battle.'<sup>10</sup>
2. relative to the historical period, *M* 'can be considered [a statement] on the psychological situation of the time,'<sup>11</sup> specifically in two ways: first as a feeling of insecurity due to the impotence of the forces of order facing criminality and the gang's organisation, and second as concerns criminality itself:

*M* confirms the moral of *The Blue Angel*: that in the wake of retrogression terrible outbursts of sadism are inevitable. Both films bear upon the psychological situation of those crucial years and both anticipate what was to happen on a large scale unless people could free themselves from the specters pursuing them.<sup>12</sup>

Various analyses of *M* present interpretations of details which are parallel to these global ideological evaluations, and which would hope to show that an isolated element can have a fixed ideological signified:

In the street scenes of *M* such familiar symbols as the rotating spiral in an optician's shop and the policeman guiding a child across the street are resuscitated. The combination of these motifs with that of a puppet incessantly hopping up and down reveals the film's wavering between the notions of anarchy and authority.<sup>13</sup>

These two types of analysis (one global, the other fragmented) function in film as what Freud calls the 'symbolic' and the 'decoding' methods for the dream:

The first of these procedures considers the content of the dream as a whole and seeks to replace it by another content which is intelligible and in certain respects analogous to the original one. This is 'symbolic' dream-interpreting, and inevitably breaks down when faced by dreams which are not merely unintelligible but also confused. . . . The second of the two methods of interpreting dreams . . . might be described as the 'decoding' method, since it treats dreams as a kind of cryptography in which each sign can be translated into another sign having a known meaning, in accordance with a fixed key.<sup>14</sup>

These two procedures are insufficient in that the meaning of the text (text of the dream or text of the film) gives only one signified by the first method, and an *addition* of signifieds by the second method: its relational aspect is in both cases totally lost.

## II.2 Narrative, 'characters', ideological statements

### II.2.1 SIGNIFICATION/VALUE

In Saussurian terms, Freud's 'symbolic' and 'decoding' approaches are concerned with *signification*: they directly relate a signifier (or a group of signifiers) to a signified. Thus, they completely overlook that which Saussure calls *value*, that is, relationships of signifiers to one another and relationships of signifieds to one another within the system:

The idea of value shows us that it is an illusion to consider a term simply as the union of a certain sound with a certain concept [in general semiotics: of a certain signifier with a certain signified]. To define it thus would be to isolate it from a system to which it belongs; this would be to believe that one can begin with the terms and construct the system by making their sum, whereas, on the contrary, it is from the solidary whole that we must proceed to obtain by analysis the elements which it encloses.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, on the narrative level, rather than trying to find out – as ideological critics have – what a character or a group of characters *represents* in Lang's thematic or in reference to the historical setting, we ask what is the character or group's *place* in the narrative (the global system) and how it differentiates itself from other characters or groups (the elements of the system) who appear concurrently. Our model is taken from the structural analysis of the narrative: the character – or the group<sup>16</sup> – is defined neither as an interior (psychological) construct, nor as an exterior (real) construct; but functionally – as a function in a system of functions.<sup>17</sup> We shall not go into detail to consider the role of the little girls, the mothers and the minor characters<sup>18</sup>, in order to

- 48 focus the analysis on the major relationships which structure the greater part of the narrative, those of the murderer, the police, and the gang.

### II.2.2 THE MURDERER, THE OTHER

(a) How are these triangular relationships set up? Fritz Lang answers this question by referring to the event which inspired his film, 'The criminal underworld of Berlin took up on its own the search for the unknown assassin to put an end to the increased activity of the police'.<sup>19</sup> In the dynamics of the narrative, the murderer is therefore the element which engenders the triangular structure by a relay of motivations<sup>20</sup>: the gang acts because the police acts because the murderer acts. But the chain stops there: the murderer obeys no narrative motivation; his motivations are of an *other* order. His position in the functional network is designated from the start as *displaced* relative to the two other vertices of the triangle.

(b) Once the relationships are set up, they function like a *duel* 'which resembles certain games in which two equal adversaries want to conquer an object [which has been] put into circulation'.<sup>21</sup> The two adversaries are the gang and the police; the desired object is the murderer. Functionally again, the murderer is designated as *other*: he has no active role in the triangle, he is only that which permits the police and the gang to play the same narrative role.

The 'structuration' (a) and the structure (b) of the narrative both designate the otherness of the murderer, and imply as a corollary, a comparable position for the police and the gang.

### II.2.3 THE POLICE AGAINST/WITH THE GANG

The question of the otherness of the murderer would require a detailed examination of the relationships which develop outside the triangle. We shall therefore limit ourselves to this relevancy, the triangle, comparing the police and the gang in their pursuit of the murderer.

(a) The main difference between the police and the gang is in their methods of investigation. Deduction, slowness, inefficiency (due particularly to contradictory testimonies) on the part of the police, contrasts with direct intervention, rapidity, efficiency (due to the admirable organisation of the beggars) on the part of the gang. 'The difference is established here to the discredit of the police, whose victory, moreover, is only due to chance (the guard who sounds the alarm). The real power throughout the film belongs to the gang, a situation which should ruin affirmations of the type, 'At the time of M, Lang's vision was still optimistic. He believed that order could overcome chaos'.<sup>22</sup>

To this main difference in the narrative structure must be added a second one which intervenes only at points: the attitudes of the police and the gang to the criminality of the murderer – that is,

the different ideological statements of the characters themselves on responsibility and punishment. For the forces of order, the murderer is mentally ill; he should not be killed because he cannot be held responsible: he must merely be kept from doing further harm, by isolation in an asylum. The gang (in the person of Schranker) recommends a more radical solution: 'We just want to render you harmless. That's what we want . . . but you'll only be harmless when you're dead'. This option is justified by considerations of three types: 'practical' (ie, to avoid a subsequent release or escape of the murderer), 'political' (as Schranker says, 'And spend the rest of your life in an institution at the state's expense . . .'), and 'moral' (as Schranker says later, 'Someone who admits to being a compulsive murderer should be snuffed out, like a candle').

(b) Here we must open a parenthesis on the status of these ideological statements in the film. They may be read as applying directly to a real extra-filmic situation. The statements of the police would represent the ideology of the Weimar Republic, those of the gang, the Nazi organisation, as the programme of euthanasia for the mentally ill suggests. They may also be read in relation to the global ideology transmitted by the film as Lang's choice to make a 'report of the facts',<sup>23</sup> to develop the pros and cons – with all that this supposes about the myth of objectivity (this reading results from the narrative structure itself, founded on this comparison). A third reading is suggested by the insistence on the gang's statements. What is the purpose of Schranker's 'practical', 'political', and 'moral'<sup>24</sup> preoccupations if not to mask the material conditions (as they are represented in the narrative)?

Conceptions made by individuals are ideas either of their relationship to nature, of their relationship to each other, or of their own nature. It is evident that, in every case, these conceptions are the conscious expression – real or imaginary – of their real relationships and activities, of their production, of their commerce, of their political and social organisation.<sup>25</sup>

The 'real' of the fictional relationships is the economic upset brought upon the gang indirectly by the murderer:

Someone who is not a member of the Union is messing up our affairs. The new measures taken by the police, the daily raids in our areas to find this child murderer, interfere with our business activities in a quite unbearable way.

The insistence on such statements designates their ideological nature in the real functioning of the fiction: this potential to exhibit ideology is characteristic of the aesthetic process; it is this potential that distinguishes 'art' from ideology – which is contrary to the mechanistic Marxist conception in which art and ideology are equivalent:<sup>26</sup>

50 Literature, and more generally, art, using ideology as part of its fictional material, exposes the fictive character of ideology. It reveals, it exposes; in this sense it is closer to science than to ideology.<sup>27</sup>

(c) The differences previously established between the police and the gang are counterbalanced by an ingenious overlapping of their attributes. Though criticism has generally held that the gang's trial is a parody of a legal trial, it has not considered two role-exchanges which confirm the assimilation of the two groups. The first exchange is represented visually in Schranker's disguise as a policeman, the second more subtlety in the 'illegal' methods used by Groeber and Lohmann to make the burglar talk. This method relies both on the lie that the guard is dead and on blackmail.

### III. The Filmic System: Role of Specific Codes in the Ideological Process

#### III.1 *Taking specificity into account*

The relationships between the police and the gang have thus far been treated without considering filmic specificity. We could have located the narrative elements and the ideological statements in the same way in a novel or a play. Schranker's disguise is not presented without purpose: first we see a policeman from behind, talking of police affairs; Schranker's face is not shown until after a shot of two pistols pointed at the guard. This delay of recognition permits the viewer to slip from the observation, 'Schranker has taken on the attributes of the police', to a proposition of the type, 'Nothing looks more like a policeman than a gangster disguised as a policeman'.

The assimilation of the gang and the police, which is only sketched narratively, is manifested several times by specific codes, and in two senses: either to establish the identity of the two clans, or to indicate that they are absolutely complementary.

#### III.2 *The identity of the gang and the police*

The meetings of the police to determine their courses of action can be considered a model of the use of a specific code, ie, montage, in an original sense: that of M's textual system. The montage of these meetings is of the form which Christian Metz calls 'alternating syntagm', summarily defined by the formula: 'Alternation of images = simultaneity of actions'.<sup>28</sup> But here this alternation is only set up to be perverted. Lang says, 'For the first time, dialogue was used in two scenes in counterpoint . . . so that the ensemble forms a *coherent whole*'.<sup>29</sup>

The formation of this coherent whole, as if the two series of shots – of the gang and of the police – stopped alternating to melt into an 'ordinary sequence',<sup>30</sup> is not only to be read in the verbal

couplings similar to the one which opens the sequence, 'SCHRANKER: I'm appealing to you . . . CHIEF OF POLICE: . . . for advice'.

When the sequence is considered in its entirety, we must recall the similar organisation of the two spaces, where the cigarette smoke thickens at the same pace. When considered in detail, the links are also made visually by the continuation of a gangster's gesture by a policeman, by the repetition (at the beginning of the sequence) of the movements of standing and sitting, or by the cutting of two shots which seem to show rear then front views of the same character leaning on a chair, while in fact, the former is a gangster and the latter a policeman.

### III.3 *The gang and the police as complementaries*

The complementary nature of the gang and the police develops playfully in their parallel investigations which operate on the one hand, from auditory clues, on the other, from visual clues:

First stage: stalemate in the investigation – the gang's surveillance (visual means) produces no result, the testimonies (auditory means) obtained by the police are useless;

Second stage: the matrix of clues – the murderer's whistling and the letter to the press;

Third stage: deployment of the chain of clues – once the whistling heard by the blind man has permitted the identification of the murderer, the gangsters make use of an arbitrary sign (itself not a clue), the letter 'M' stamped on the murderer's back, to facilitate the pursuit. Once the murderer has escaped, sound betrays him again when he tries to get out of the attic where he has taken refuge. On the police side, the murderer's letter is exploited in two ways: as a clue (in that it has been written with a red pencil on rough wood), and as a symptom (because it reveals the pathological character of the murderer). The investigation then follows this double trail, trying to find in the rooms of the mentally ill (of which a list has been made) material traces left from the writing of the letter. In spite of an error in the investigation (the assumption that the letter was written on a *table*), the discovery of an empty cigarette pack puts the police back on the murderer's track: a policeman returns to M's room and discovers indeed pencil marks on the window-sill. Two auditory clues for the gang, two visual clues for the police: the symmetry of the chains is perfect, their unfolding absolutely autonomous, until their communication is made possible by the building guard.

Fourth stage: communication of the chains – the guard sounds the alarm (auditory), a shot followed immediately by one of the police commissioner deciphering from the ticket-tape machine (visual) the information indicating where the alarm was sounded.

Lang, whose first sound film is *M*,<sup>21</sup> discovers the immense potential of sound in film and the power of specifically audio-visual configurations, which, taking off from sensorially heterogeneous



52 elements, constitute a homogenous textual space. This purely cinematic experience becomes his *mise-en-scène* of the gang and the police, who, though dissimilar, enter into a common order which they realise together.

#### IV. Textual Overdetermination, Systematic Overinterpretation

On the level of non-specific codes (narrative, 'characters', ideological statements), a network of similarities and differences has been established between the police and the gang, in their relationships to the murderer and in their reciprocal relationships. By various comparisons (complementary, or of identity), specific codes (montage and audio-visual figures) reinforce the assimilation of the two groups. In the interaction of the non-specific and the specific within the system, we find what Christian Metz noticed in Griffith's *Intolerance*:

What is distinctive in the system of *Intolerance* is neither the parallel montage nor the humanitarian ideology, both of which appear elsewhere – nor even a unique use of parallel montage or a unique version of the humanitarian ideology, for nowhere . . . can one find one without the other. The system of the film is the meeting of one with the other, the active fashioning of one by the other, the exact point – the only point – where these two structures succeed, in every sense of the word, in 'working' together.<sup>32</sup>

We shall not draw conclusions as to the ideology transmitted by the relational interplay of the gang and the police in *M* – this would be to fall into the trap of the work's 'ultimate signified', the trap of the 'true meaning', which we denounced. It is indeed the plurality of the text, that is, the plurality of possible readings of it, which permits the textual analysis of *M*. *M* is not a militant film, where the plurisemic problem would present itself in other terms: the status of the police and the gang is 'oscillating', 'ambiguous' – oscillation and ambiguity which could, moreover, be taken up in an ideological analysis. It would be possible to consider these attributes as the reflection of contradictions exterior to the text, of the type which Lenin points out in the work of Tolstoy.<sup>33</sup>

To speak of the ideology proper to a filmic system, it seems, then, that we must proceed as Freud does in dream interpretation:

The fact that the meanings of dreams are arranged in super-imposed layers is one of the most delicate, though also one of the most interesting, problems of dream-interpretation. Anyone who forgets this possibility will easily go astray and be led into making untenable assertions upon the nature of dreams.<sup>34</sup> It is only with the greatest difficulty that the beginner in the business of interpreting dreams can be persuaded that his task is not at

an end when he has a complete interpretation in his hands – an interpretation which makes sense, is coherent and throws light upon every element of the dream's content. For the same dream may perhaps have another interpretation as well, an 'over-interpretation', which has escaped him.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, our present reading of *M*, sensitive to this interplay of over-determination and overinterpretation, is itself only partial: partial relative to the totality of the text because it intends to consider only some of the relationships (limiting itself to the triangle: murderer, gang, police); and partial relative to the textual system. The specific codes, for example, have been studied solely in relation to non-specific codes; however, one could certainly conceive another reading, dealing with the ideology they transmit on their own: how, formally, they produce an 'effect of reality' by a specific treatment of the image, the sound – the relationships of these – the syntagmatic links, etc.

Overinterpretation does not restrict itself to a determined number of readings, so that another reading could always come and (re)constitute the textual system according to a new systematic order – not by excluding the previous systems, but by superimposing itself upon them.

#### Notes

1. Gilbert Cohen-Séat, *Essai sur les principes d'une philosophie du cinéma*, Paris, PUF, 1946, p 53 ff.
2. Christian Metz, *Langage et Cinéma*, Paris, Larousse, 1971, p 7.
3. Christian Metz, *op cit*.
4. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de Linguistique générale*, Paris, Payot, 1916, ch V ('Eléments internes et éléments externes de la langue'). (Ed Note, *Course in General Linguistics*, McGraw Hill, 1966).
5. Roland Barthes, 'Eléments de Sémiologie', in *Communications*, no 4, Paris, Seuil, 1954, p 133 (Ed Note, *Elements of Semiology*, Cape, 1968).
6. Christian Metz, *op cit*, p 112 (Ed Note, see Glossary, *Screen* v 14 n 1/2 1973).
7. 'What characterises the textual (= the non-systematic) is that it consists in an actual unwinding, a "concrete" object which pre-dates the intervention of the analyst; it is that which demands to be understood'. Christian Metz, *op cit*, p 57.
8. We have found either one or both of these analytical patterns in all the texts we have read on *M*:  
Borde, Bauche, and Courtade, *Le cinéma réaliste allemand*, Lyon, Serdoc, 1965.  
Francis Courtade, *Fritz Lang*, Losfeld, Paris, 1963.  
Alfred Eibel, *Fritz Lang*, Paris, Présence du Cinéma, 1954.  
Lotte H Eisner, 'Le style de *M le Maudit*', in *L'Avant-Scène Cinéma*, no 39, 1964. (*L'Ecran démoniaque*, Paris, Losfeld, 1965, can be considered separately in as much as Lotte H Eisner deals only with formal processes.)  
*Fantastique et réalisme dans le cinéma allemand 1912-1933*, catalogue of the Musée du Cinéma de Bruxelles, 1969.  
Nicholas Garnham, 'Introduction to *M*', in *M*, London, Lorrimer, 1968.

- Paul M. Jensen, *The Cinema of Fritz Lang*, New York, Barnes, 1969.
- Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1947, new ed.: 1969.
- Luc Moullet, *Fritz Lang*, Paris, Seghers, 1963, new ed.: 1970.
9. Lang himself admits that this theme of 'a man trapped by fate' is central to his work (cf 'Happily Ever After', *Penguin Film Review*, no 5, London and New York, 1948).
  10. Nicolas Garnham, *op cit*, p 11.
  11. Siegfried Kracauer, *op cit*, p 215.
  12. Siegfried Kracauer, *op cit*, p 227.
  13. Siegfried Kracauer, *op cit*, p 222.
  14. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, New York, Avon Books, 1967, ch II, p 128 ff.
  15. Ferdinand de Saussure, *op cit*, p 157.
  16. ie, in more precise terms, the *dramatis personae* (in Propp's work) or the *actants* (in Greimas's work) cf next note.
  17. This functional conception of the narrative appears in: Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, The Hague, Mouton and Co, 1968. It is to be found also in: A J Greimas, *Sémantique structurale*, Paris, Larousse, 1966, and in: Ronald Barthes, 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits', in *Communications*, no 8, Paris, 1966, among others.
  18. These details are certainly not indifferent: they, for example, assure the functioning of the first sequence, cf: Thierry Kuntzel, 'Le Travail du Film', in *Communications*, no 19, 1972.
  19. 'M - Ein Tatsachenbericht', *Die Filmwoche*, no 21, 1931.
  20. Cf Gerard Genette, 'Vraisemblable et motivation', *Communications*, no 11, Paris, 1968.
  21. Roland Barthes, 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits', *op cit*.
  22. Nicholas Garnham, *op cit*, p 10.
  23. Fritz Lang as quoted in, Eibel, Alfred, *op cit*, p 33.
  24. The 'real' stakes of Schranker's statements are such that even the most perilous discourse will be retained: the condemnation of a crime by a criminal.
  25. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *L'Ideologie allemande*, Paris, Editions Sociales, 1968, note 1, pp 34, 35.
  26. The identification of art and ideology also appears in: Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx*, Paris, Maspero, 1966, p 168 (Ed Note, *For Marx*, NLB 1968): 'Ideology, whether political, moral, legal, or artistic, transforms (itself) its object, etc . . . '.
  27. *Cahiers Marxistes Léninistes*, no 12-13, juillet-octobre, 1966 ('Art langue: lutte de classes'), p 6.
  28. Christian Metz, *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1968, p 130.
  29. Quoted in: Alfred Eibel, *op cit*, p 18.
  30. Christian Metz, *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, p 133.
  31. On this point, cf: Eibel, *op cit*, for example, pp 181, 138, 140.
  32. Christian Metz, *Langage et Cinéma*, *op cit*, p 83.
  33. Lenin, 'Leon Tolstoï, miroir de la révolution russe', 'Leon Tolstoï et son époque', in *Ecrits sur l'art et la littérature*, Moscou, Editions du progrès, 1969, p 25 ff, pp 55-56, p 57 ff.
  34. Sigmund Freud, *op cit*, p 253, note 1.
  35. Sigmund Freud, *op cit*, p 562.

Nicholas Garnham

A rapid reading of Kuntzel's text might lead readers to assume that he was criticising my own text on *M*. To correct this erroneous impression and to demonstrate that Kuntzel's text is conventional film criticism (and none the worse for that) masquerading as theoretical novelty. I will start by reprinting my own text for purposes of comparison:

*Introduction\**

Perhaps the key sequence in *M* is the one in which Lang cuts back and forth between a meeting of underworld leaders and a meeting of police chiefs. He uses every means at his command to equate these two groups, inter-cutting, camera angles and groupings, the same smoke-filled light, overlapping gestures and speech. This equation of what are traditionally seen in gangster pictures as good and evil, is central to Lang's universe. The world he portrays is a Manichean one in which the forces of good and evil, equally matched, constantly fight for man's soul as the police and the underworld both relentlessly pursue *M* the murderer.

Lang's favourite image for this dualism is the mirror. For it is significant that the murderer first sees the *M* on his back, the mark of Cain, in a mirror. *M* also is a letter whose mirror-image is the same as its real self.

This mirroring is carried right through the structure of the film. For the conflict between good and evil within the murderer himself, the *doppel-gänger* who haunts him, is itself a reflection of the conflict between crime and the law.

At this period Lang took a view of the law similar to Aeschylus. It is a symbol of God's order on earth. It is the one bulwark against chaos and therefore at the end of *M* it is presented as a saviour.

It is this closeness to classical Greek morality that Godard explored when he got Lang to play himself in *Le Mépris*, a film in which the German director is making a film of *The Odyssey*. In Lang's work we see the director looking down on his world like some Greek god, imposing a pattern on the warring universe. Lang himself has said that his constant concern has been man fighting his destiny. And this destiny is represented by Lang's style, by the very mechanics of film-making. His awareness of the forces of evil and chaos, always on the prowl, makes him fasten like a vice round

\* Reprinted here, with the permission of the publishers, from the film script *M*, Lorrimer Books, London 1968.

56 his world and his characters. Unlike directors such as Renoir and Mitzoguchi, Lang can never allow his characters or his audience to feel free. Every shot has a specific structure in which his characters are trapped as in a spider's web. The camera is constantly looking down, imposing itself on the characters. And Lang's editing style locks every shot to the preceding and succeeding shot in sequences that drag the characters remorselessly forward like some inescapable fate. In Lang, editing is functional. When a character makes a suggestion or has a thought, as often as not the next shot illustrates the results of that suggestion or thought. So man is always being brought to face the results of his conduct.

It is in this sense that Lang is such a remorseless moralist, and such a pure film-maker. Unlike Renoir, for instance, neither accident nor mercy really enters his world. Everything is governed by an inexorable logic. In Lang's last film, *The 1,000 Eyes of Dr Mabuse*, the whole world has been reduced to a vast hotel over which his evil genius watches by means of television cameras. A director in a television control room, dictating a pattern of action by selection from his all-seeing eyes, is Lang's vision of God.

At the time of *M*, Lang's vision was still optimistic. He believed that order could overcome chaos, but under the impact first of Hitler and then of American society, this optimism crumbled. In *Fury*, the law court has become an obscene joke. In *You Only Live Once*, the forces of law and order are seen as remorseless, impersonal forces destroying personal happiness. In *The Big Heat*, the hero has to leave the police force and take on the characteristics of a gangster in order to revenge himself on his wife's killers.

Yet the mirror-image and the fight between good and evil persists. In *You Only Live Once*, the happy honeymooners are seen reflected in a pool during their brief moment of happiness; a stone disturbs the water and they are on their way to inevitable death.

In *Woman in the Window*, Edward G Robinson, a quiet respectable business-man, has a terrible nightmare in which he is involved in adultery and murder. The nightmare and the reality are presented in an identically similar style. One is a mirror-image of the other and it shows vividly how thin and fragile is the barrier that protects us from our other self. In Lang's world man must be constantly on his guard against his own personal furies. The façade of ordered, rational behaviour is hardly strong enough to contain the boiling destructive urges that we all share. Indeed, in *M*, Lang uses the ironies implicit in a trial conducted by criminals to point a finger at us all. None of you is innocent, he says. None of you is safe. Morality is a process of constant vigilance and battle.

I should like to make the following brief points:

1. Section III of Kuntzel's text on the filmic system is a reworking of my first paragraph. Indeed, I think it is clear that throughout his text he shares my interpretation of the film. My own text

doesn't claim any theoretical rigour, but is a few five-year-old observations. I haven't re-seen the film in question since then, but since Kuntzel shares my views I will, for the purposes of argument, stand by my interpretation of that date.

2. Kuntzel describes my critical method as 'symbolic' and claims that I research 'Lang's eternal themes (which would recur unchanged from film to film)' and that I have a 'deep belief in one meaning . . . the true meaning . . . of the text'.

Nowhere in my text is there any justification for this charge. I do not believe in one meaning and I explicitly, if briefly, show how the particular theme of Lang's which I chose to examine changes from film to film. There are, of course, other themes and other interpretations co-existing in *M* and in Lang's other films, eg the theme of sexual expression and fantasy and its relation to dreams, mirrors and myth in films as diverse as *The Nibelungen*, *M*, *The Big Heat*, *Woman in the Window*. But to expect the exhaustive work of interpretation is the same as belief in one meaning.

3. Kuntzel's text promises and then refuses to deliver. He criticises all previous writing on *M* as either 'symbolic' or 'decoding'. But he then uses the same procedures and unsurprisingly arrives at the same results. Whether we choose to call our shared procedure symbolic or semiological seems to me irrelevant. Kuntzel's text, by imposing a new terminology on an old practice, aspires to theoretical rigour and novelty it does not possess.

4. Having set out apparently to describe a method of critical analysis for the treatment of ideology, he then refuses this task.

We shall not draw conclusions as to the ideology transmitted by the relational interplay of the gang and the police in *M*.

But if he refuses to draw such conclusions, however tentative and partial, he rejects 'meaning' and his criticism is not analytical, but merely descriptive.

I would agree that 'the status of the police and the gang' is 'oscillating', 'ambiguous' and I think that I would now stress the contradiction this reveals within *M* in particular and Lang's work in general. I would now modify what Kuntzel describes as my affirmation of Lang's optimism. However if Kuntzel wishes to argue with such an affirmation, he is presumably prepared to accept that such an affirmation at least has meaning and so undertake that ideological analysis he here refuses.

5. Although he criticises the 'decoding' method of Kracauer, he in fact uses such a method himself (p 49). For what else is his third reading of the gang's statements on crime and punishment, but this method, namely that they 'mask the material conditions' and that 'the insistence on such statements designates their ideological nature in the real functioning of the fiction; the potential to exhibit ideology is characteristic of the aesthetic process'. If this potential is characteristic, why should Kracauer be

58 reproached for describing the ideology which he finds exhibited in *M*?

Moreover I cannot myself see any difference in principle between Lenin's work on Tolstoy and Kracauer's.

6. Kuntzel's real difficulty is that his critical method is based upon a misapprehension that it is possible to study a non-arbitrary sign system as a 'system which knows only its own order'. (I leave open the question of whether this is possible in linguistics.) Sign systems are social structures. We can never derive meaning from the study of filmic fact in isolation.

Such a procedure has a valuable descriptive function, but only as a basis for the analysis of meaning and such meanings cannot be divorced from cinematic fact. Barthes seems to beg this crucial question, for how is it possible to 'consider the objects solely in relation to their meaning, without bringing in . . . the other determinants (psychological, sociological or physical)'. For instance, any analysis of *M* simply falls to pieces if we cannot use words like 'gang' and 'police', confident that they have meanings external to the structure of language. But this relates to the crucial point made by Todorov (*Screen*, v 14 n 1/2) that film criticism uses conventional language, which is applied not from within the filmic system, but by definition from without. Indeed, we cannot, as critics, audiences, etc. be considered in a situation of 'immanence' unless we take into account psychological and physical determinants at the very least (eg the powers of sight and hearing, the process of identification).

To sum up, Kuntzel demonstrates the impossibility of his undertaking by being forced when actually dealing with his chosen text *M* into using conventional critical tools. Since I share his views on *M*, I agree with them. The rest is not theory, but jargon.

Kari Hanet

Understanding how films are understood requires thinking the cinema as a language, that is as a structured communication between individuals, in this case, usually in the form of entertainment. This social function of the cinema, however, is changing and the cinema is becoming more and more openly an ideological tool. Recurrently, theories of the cinema revolve round the notion that film is intrinsically a means of reproducing external reality. The camera's mechanism obeys the laws of optics and the reality reproduced in the image depends on these laws, on the choice of object at which the camera is pointed, and how the camera is pointed. Thus the techniques of film-making since they involve the conscious or unconscious direction of the camera's eye are by nature ideological.

Since each film creates its own signs and system of signification, and as its aesthetic message is to some extent self-focussing, but also since its pro-filmic event consists usually of elements taken from external reality (ie conventions of visual representation or socio-cultural symbols), the 'realism' of the images inevitably will be transformed by their organisation into the fictional filmic text,<sup>1</sup> ie the narrative discourse. Realism therefore is partly determined by the balance achieved between aesthetics and ideology, their interaction constituting the structural form of the film, itself produced by how the technical apparatus alters the pro-filmic event. It is also partly determined by the relationships the viewer establishes between the fictional world presented by the finished film and the 'real' world. In each case the frameworks of ideological and aesthetic reference fashion the analogical relation seen between the visual message<sup>2</sup> and reality. Thus the criteria defining realism<sup>3</sup> vary with the evolution of social organisation, economic, social and cultural differences, the role of cinematic education, and with the introduction of different cinematic techniques.

It is therefore important to examine the type of pro-filmic event chosen, and not only the cinematic treatment. Unlike a stage set or a piece of prose, a filmic image tends to be ambiguous and over-descriptive. Not all that enters the filmic event is essential to the fiction and its narrative structure, unless, of course, the film-maker constructs his fiction, hence his images, according to the Brechtian concept of realism. The pro-filmic event, in that case, is not taken from external reality and the filmic discourse is not developed purely within the realism allowed in the image by the technical apparatus; instead the filmic event is constructed on the same principles of economy as is a stage set. This can be seen in



60 Oshima's *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief* (1968) and *Ceremony* (1971), or in Ichikawa's *An Actor's Revenge* (1963), where two policemen hold on to a tight rope, vibrating across a black empty screen, only to discover that the thief has attached the rope to a tree trunk and fled. All Ichikawa employs with constructive editing are an abstract space, three actors, a tree, and a rope. Usually though, the selection and subsequent arrangement of the elements of the pro-filmic event rely heavily on a relationship of analogy with the 'real' world. The use of the cinematic language is then so discrete it seems non-existent. The mediation between the real world – cum – pro-filmic event and filmic reality is obscured and the plane of expression or substance of content seems unmodified, thus leading to the ideological concept of realism, that film reflects reality 'directly'.

Most narrative films are realistic in the conventional sense though, not only does the film-maker present his work as a 'truthful depiction of reality', but the viewer also makes the subjective judgement that the image is or is not a 'truthful depiction of reality'.<sup>4</sup> The viewing situation then, is defined by the possible confrontations of different concepts of realism and by the viewer's general ideological, aesthetic, and cultural frameworks of reference. Moreover, the textual system of many narrative films displays a considerable amount of 'superfluous' details and an accumulation of repetitive codes, partly in order to reduce the intrinsic ambiguity and polysemy of images, and partly in order to achieve an optimum realistic effect. Thus the 'iconic context'<sup>5</sup> within which the narrative discourse is finally organised requires as much attention as does the type of pro-filmic event selected. Recognising the form and the substance of content of the image in a visual message corresponds to the 'intra-iconic' context, while the 'inter-iconic' context is defined by the process governing how the images are linked together into sequences of one or several images, according to the meaning conferred to them. Hence particularly relevant is the type of editing chosen for establishing spatio-temporal contiguity and different types of transitions between images (either the substance or the form of content), but also the transitions and relationships between the constituent codes of the visual message.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the 'extra-iconic' context, or general framework of reference (ideological, cultural, aesthetic) of the viewer is of paramount importance to film. Because images are not arbitrary signs, they bear some relation to the reality a film uses as its pro-filmic event, hence the influence of, and, in some cases, the real need for the cultural knowledge and experience of the spectator, plays an essential part in the reading of a film. *Ceremony* (1971) or *Red Psalm* (Jancsó, 1971), for instance, become difficult to understand without some knowledge of Japanese or Hungarian history, while *Ceremony* presents the added complexity of a cultural and aesthetic iconography unfamiliar to a Western viewer.

To exemplify these aspects, part one of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Resnais, 1958-9) will be discussed at some length. The organisation of the film shows a remarkable possibility of combining visual, verbal and non-verbal codes to produce a narrative text that mingles traditional realism with a more creative form of cinematic discourse; thus the filmic text has a more complex (and at the time quite rare) concept of the visual message.<sup>7</sup> There is much less redundancy between the verbal and visual codes constituting the visual message and between the visual codes themselves, while the non-verbal codes are integrated purposefully into the overall structure of the narrative.

The opening sequence combines several types of pro-filmic elements: newsreel material, shot after 6th August 1945, fictitious newsreel documentary made by the Japanese,<sup>8</sup> and museum documents (mainly photographs and specimen). Some of this pro-filmic material is therefore already a filmic event; moreover its arrangement is generally thought to conform to what was considered reality at that time. The audience receives these images as genuine recordings and faithful reconstructions of that historical event, yet within the narrative structure their presence is not necessarily intended to truthfully depict that reality. Rather this visual information forms one element of the visual message, which in turn may or may not refer back to the form of content of that constituent visual image (code). In other words, the effect of reality produced by some of the pro-filmic material is sometimes reinvested into the visual message apparently unmodified, and the other codes, verbal and non-verbal, only reinforce that effect, which is then the signified, or meaning, of that particular visual message.

Without the knowledge provided by the 'extra-iconic' context that 'Hiroshima' means the first city in history to have been destroyed by an atomic explosion, the opening sequence of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* suddenly becomes meaningless since the relationship between the Hiroshima sequence and the Nevers sequence is lost, and the fundamental conflict between opposing values upon which the film is constructed (ie substance of content) disappears. Moreover, the notion of extra-iconic context, not only encompasses Metz's distinction of extra-cinematic codes, it also includes the cinematic codes that organise different types of filmic texts (newsreel, documentary, fiction, commercial), hence the ability to distinguish between different types of cinematic treatment of the pro-filmic event. The 'extra-iconic' context therefore largely determines the kind of realism a film is thought to present. For instance, the newsreel footage Resnais uses as pro-filmic event is read as newsreel, ie unmodified, 'real', because the content of those images corresponds to those other visual and non-visual sources established as true documentation of that historical event (the film's commentary only corroborates this judgment, it does

62 not command it), and uses the different grain and at times wobbly camera peculiar to newsreel techniques. Thus the viewer's subjective judgement is founded on the form of content of the pro-filmic event, on a mimetic or 'direct' correspondence set-up between the filmic event and external reality.

On the other hand, the realism presented by the first hospital sequence or the exterior shots of the museum is induced primarily through a specific use of the cinematic language and arrangement of the pro-filmic event, ie internal coherence of the fictional reality of the filmic text. Elsewhere, however, the transformation of the pro-filmic event is determined less by cinematic treatment than by the structure of the narrative text. The relation between the 'intra-iconic' context and the visual message is a metaphorical one. The substance of content of the image is a constituent of the visual message, here completed by the verbal code. Images of the streets of contemporary Hiroshima combine with expressions of physical love to form a visual message that relies on the choice of frontal shot angle and tracking forward of the camera, emphasised by the composition of the images. The relation, then, between image and visual message is not defined by the analogical representation of reality the image offers, but by the rhythm and mood created by the combination of a particular cinematic code and spatial configuration, interacting with the verbal code, and thus determined by the narrative context.

Crucial then to the discussion is an analysis of what constitutes the narrative context of a particular film. In determining this for *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, several distinctions concerning the structure of narrative discourse proved fruitful.<sup>9</sup> These are: diegesis, narration, and narrative discourse. 'Narrative discourse' is the telling, the narrative signifier, the film in toto. It includes what is being told, that is the narrative content or narrative signified, ie the 'diegesis', and how the diegesis is told, the creative act itself which is 'narration', encompassing all the techniques that go into producing the diegesis. The narrative discourse, however, is the only one of these distinctions immediately accessible to textual analysis, since, narration and diegesis exist only by virtue of the existence of a narrative text; on the other hand, narrative discourse only exists by virtue of a twofold relation, as narrative, with the diegesis it tells, as discourse, with the narration producing it.

The diegesis of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* might be summarised as follows. A Frenchwoman is in Hiroshima working on a propaganda film for peace in the world. She meets a Japanese man and they make love in Hiroshima. During their brief encounter, she tells two stories: the first concerns her view of what happened in Hiroshima some fifteen years ago; the second is the story of her youthful wartime love affair in Nevers. The diegesis includes these two stories, each a metadiegesis,<sup>10</sup> ie a story within the diegesis told by one of its protagonists. In the opening section of *Hiroshima*

*Mon Amour*, transition from one narrative situation to another is never made explicit. Images of lovers embracing intermingle with images that tell the history of Hiroshima. Only later, during the next scene, is any kind of causal relation suggested to explain the narrative context of that first part of the film.<sup>11</sup>

The transition then, is achieved by the narration, itself the very process by which knowledge of a new situation is introduced within another situation already known. In other words, narration refers to the selection of the pro-filmic event and to its chosen cinematic treatment at any one point in the narrative discourse. By acting upon the pro-filmic event, ie action on the image as analogical representation of reality, narration defines the iconic context of the visual message and the type of realism presented in the filmic text by establishing the relations between the filmic event and the points of reference (filmic and/or in reality).

*Hiroshima Mon Amour* is not a documentary film about the fate Hiroshima met in 1945, but a fiction, and Hiroshima's history is as much part of the narrative as Nevers and the two lovers. Yet, this fate is a true historical event, whose 'image', documented by various media (newspapers, photographs, books, films), constitutes part of the cultural knowledge (ie extra-iconic context) the viewer refers to when reading this sequence. This extra-iconic context, moreover, enables the viewer to establish that the images showing the after-effects of the bomb are not realistic, but 'real'. The filmic event carries an effect of reality already provided by the pro-filmic event, itself a filmic event believed to be a truthful recording of reality.<sup>12</sup> As form of content of the visual code, however, the effect of reality of this filmic event is sometimes modified by the specific narrative situation. Thus the effect of reality produced or intended to be produced by the visual codes of visual messages in the metadiegesis is often undermined by the counter-effect achieved by the simultaneous presence of diegetic codes. Sometimes, the effect (an effect of narration) is achieved by using the verbal code alone as when the man says: 'What museum at Hiroshima?' over an exterior shot of the museum building, one of a series of single static shots cemented by quick montage.<sup>13</sup> Sometimes though, verbal code and treatment of the pro-filmic event are combined as presence of the diegesis interacting with the metadiegesis to affect the filmic reality of the images in the sequence. Thus, the effect of reality offered by the visual codes of the first hospital sequence is undermined by what the man says and by the correlation between cinematic treatment and intra-iconic arrangement of the pro-filmic event. To the constant tracking forward movement of the hand-held camera, itself occasionally slightly tilted (inter-iconic context), corresponds the movement – at a similar pace – of the patients who turn away as the camera approaches them (intra-iconic context).<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, whereas the 'reality' of Hiroshima's history, as

64 present in this particular filmic discourse, can be a matter for dispute within a diegetic context (the subject of the conflict between the two characters), within a metadiegetic context, and this applies to the viewer as well (a Western viewer at any rate).<sup>15</sup> the images are indeed believed to be truthful recordings, ie 'real'. The effect of reality already produced by the pro-filmic event (ie newsreel footage) is reinvested into the filmic event – the form of content of the visual message in a metadiegetic sequence – as in the previously discussed newsreel sequence showing images of the first survivors among the ruins,<sup>16</sup> or in the sequence showing women and children in a hospital, the mutilated survivors of the catastrophe.<sup>17</sup> Thus the form of content of the metadiegetic visual message is founded on the relation (on a syntagmatic plane only) between the signifieds of visual and verbal codes. The verbal code might almost be said to be redundant since it only confirms the reading given the visual code by the perceptual code and the extra-iconic context.

Nevertheless, the metadiegetic visual messages do not always reproduce the effect of reality provided by the pro-filmic event. Instead, this effect of reality, the form of content of the visual code, is played against a verbal code, whose relation with it is neither relay nor anchorage, but incompatibility. Images of wounds and mutilations are juxtaposed with words that tell of the extraordinary vitality of flowers springing up from under the ashes and of the illusionary belief that memory is everlasting.<sup>18</sup> Here, the form of content of the visual message is constituted by the complimentary relation between opposite signifieds – ie a paradigmatic *and* a syntagmatic discrepancy between visual and verbal meanings – hence a mental metamorphosis producing an emotional meaning, rather than a notional meaning.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the effect of reality of the visual code is not the signified of the visual message at that particular moment in the narrative discourse. Instead, it functions as one of two connotators, constituent of the metadiegetic visual message.

In another sequence,<sup>20</sup> the metadiegetic visual message is formed by the complimentary relation between word and image. The verbal code tells how oblivion is unavoidable, despite the universally recognised necessity to remember, while the visual code acts as relay by 'illustrating' remembrance with images of souvenir gift-shops, memorials, ruins, and tourists visiting them, – an objective analogy between the codes on a syntagmatic plane. On two occasions,<sup>21</sup> however, the analogy is a subjective one since the relationship between word and image is a metaphorical one, while the emotional meaning produced concerns oblivion. In the first instance, the word 'oblivion' heard over the previous image is immediately followed in the next shot by the image of a memorial in the background and a cat strolling by, whose conspicuous presence in the foreground draws attention to the empty open space

in the middle distance. The last image of the sequence repeats in closer shot the spider-like framework of the glass roofed dome of a ruined building and is held for four seconds instead of the one second in the previous shot, while finally are spoken the words 'Listen to me' (no verbal code over the previous two shots). Cinematic treatment and arrangement of the pro-filmic event and organisation of the codes within the narrative discourse produce here a visual message whose function is to induce a subjective effect in the viewer. This emotional meaning might well be judged 'realistic' by the viewer, though, unlike the realism produced by the effect of reality provided by the visual code and deemed so by the extra-iconic context, this type of subjective realism is conferred to the visual message essentially through the consistent filmic structure peculiar to this narrative discourse.

Therefore the narrative context determined by narration – ie action on the pro-filmic event chosen (cinematic and intra-iconic) – produces the iconic context of the visual code first, then of the visual message, hence the interplay between real and objective information and metaphoric description (which are fundamentally opposed) and how these factors lead to the total depiction of a filmic reality, hence the type of realism presented by the narrative discourse. The 'real', then, is metaphorically used to create the filmic reality, which in turn induces potential reality for the spectator so that the specific ideology arising out of the film is then infused back into the culture.

Realism therefore involves ideology on the part of the filmmaker in his choice of material (*what* he films), ideology in the effect (of reality) he wants to produce (*how* he films), and in the viewer – *what he sees and interprets*. Realism is thus the product of conscious and unconscious manipulation and ultimately relies on the fact that the viewer (for whom the film is made) erroneously believes the 'camera does not lie'.

#### Notes

1. Not only is the textual system of a film a connoted system (an already existing system of signification forms the plane of expression), but its plane of expression is itself constituted by several systems, themselves connoted systems, since as soon as they form the pro-filmic event, they are transformed by their interaction on the plane of expression of the filmic system.
2. Following the practice of Umberto Eco, 'visual message' refers to what in fact are composite texts; strictly speaking, 'visual message' should only refer to the image, in this article, the 'visual code'. It seems reasonable to continue to refer to the composite text as 'visual message', since, as in the image where not everything structuring it is 'visual', a filmic message is structured by a combination of words, images, and sounds, and moreover its image is particularly composed of non-visual codes. Cf Metz's introduction to *Communications* 15 (1970), 'Au-delà de l'analogie, l'image', and Umberto Eco in 'Towards a Semiotic Enquiry into the Television Message', *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* no 3 (1972 Autumn),

3. Cf Paul Willemen, 'On Realism in the Cinema', *Screen* v 13 n 1.
4. Cf Willemen, *ibid* p 37.
5. In *Langage de l'Image*, A M Thibault-Laulan makes the helpful distinction of three types of iconic contexts characterising images: extra-iconic, intra-iconic, and inter-iconic. Cf Introduction, Chapter 2, pp 25-30, Editions Universitaires, 1971.
6. Particularly helpful here are Barthes' notions of 'relay' and 'anchorage', in 'Rhetoric of the Image', translated in *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* no 1 (Spring 1971).
7. 'Sound seen as a new element of *mise-en-scène*, as a factor independent of the visual image, will necessarily introduce new and amazingly powerful means for expressing and solving the most complex problems.' Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandroff in their *Manifesto on the Coming of Sound*, July 1928, translated from *Tu n'a rien vu à Hiroshima*, Séminaire du Film et du Cinéma, ed by R Ravar, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1962, p 199; quoted by Paul Davay, 'L'Expression du souvenir et le contrepoint sonovisuel: quelques étapes qui ont conduit à Hiroshima'.
8. Evidence by Resnais given in an interview: 'There are newsreel extracts and extracts from films. I wished to make as it were a quotation. They come from a film called *Hiroshima*'. *Ibid* p 210.
9. G Genette, *Figures III, Discours du Récit*, Seuil, Paris 1972, p 72 and pp 255-6.
10. *Meta-* here indicates that the narrative discourse has switched to a different narrative plane. Unlike its logico-linguistic model (meta-language) metadiegesis refers to the world of another story contained within the world of the first one, the diegesis. *Ibid* pp 238-9.
11. *Lui: Et pourquoi voulais-tu tout voir à Hiroshima? Elle: Ça m'intéressait, J'ai mon idée là-dessus. Par exemple, tu vois, de bien regarder, je crois que ça s'apprend.* Script by M. Duras, Gallimard, Paris 1960, p 30.
12. Cf. *supra* p 4.
13. Shots No 14-19. The numbers refer to those given to the shots in the shot description published with the findings of the Bruxelles Seminar on Hiroshima (*op cit*) which proved a useful and usually reliable transcription of the film.
14. Shots No 6-12; *Lui: Tu n'as pas vu d'hôpital à Hiroshima. Tu n'as rien vu à Hiroshima*'. (12); script p 17.
15. Cf the twofold role of the extra-iconic context.
16. Shots No 46-52; cf *supra* pp 4 and 5.
17. Shots No 63-73.
18. Shots No 53-61.
19. Or 'cognitive' and 'emotive' as these different modes of meaning are also called; cf J Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp 448-9, p 489 note; also C K Ogden and I A Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, 8th edition, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1946.
20. Shots No 88-105.
21. Shots No 94 and 105.

Christine Gledhill

*The following piece arises out of work done for the proposed SEFT Summer School in Film and TV Documentary. The school was to follow a model teaching syllabus for presenting basic concepts and problems involved in the study of documentary. At the same time it included an examination of the critical and educational values informing both the study itself and the current situation in film criticism and education in this country. For this reason screenings of *Vivre sa Vie*, *Pravda*, and *Vent d'Est* were to take place in conjunction with documentation that included Victor Perkins's critique of *Vivre sa Vie*, Peter Wollen's essay 'Counter Cinema: Vent d'Est' and the BFI Godard Study Unit, edited by Steve Crofts.\**

The study of Godard raises directly problems of criticism at a time when radical changes are taking place in film-making and theory. When we came to examine available documentation, we found that the contrast in approach between Victor Perkins and Peter Wollen's essays on two of Godard's films focussed very fruitfully those questions about critical theory and method which are both central to debates about documentary cinema and are the present concern of *Screen*. This cannot be dismissed as a matter of the different contexts in which the articles appear or of their different readership; similar issues mark the BFI Study Unit where critical differences take on wider educational implications. What follows is an attempt to open up for examination this example of opposing critical and educational practices at work.

Despite the fact of the different contexts in which these essays appear, and that each critic starts from a radically different standpoint, a close comparison reveals first that they are faced with an essentially similar problem and secondly that they begin with similar perceptions of the processes and devices through which Godard's films operate. What emerges in terms of contrast is a difference in theoretical position and critical procedure which sharply differentiates their ability to make sense of Godard's practices and opens up the ideological problem at the centre of the current debate between orthodox and radical film criticism.

\* Victor Perkins, '*Vivre sa Vie*' in the *Films of Jean-Luc Godard*, Ian Cameron ed, London, 1969. Peter Wollen, 'Counter Cinema: *Vent d'Est*' in *Afterimage*, no 4, Autumn 1972. BFI Study Unit, No 15, compiled by Steve Crofts, September 1972.



The problem the two writers face is to relate two radically opposed practices in film-making, taking into account their respective critical values, norms and methods. Peter Wollen begins by using this opposition to offer a set of paired categories which identify opposing formal devices, the aesthetic and ideological concepts that inform them, and the principles involved in the adoption of one set rather than the other. He concludes by positing the relationship between the two cinemas:

But (Godard) is mistaken if he thinks that such a counter-cinema can have an absolute existence. It can only exist in relation to the rest of the cinema. Its function is to struggle against the fantasies, ideologies and aesthetic devices of one cinema with its own antagonistic fantasies, ideologies and aesthetic devices.

Although Victor Perkins opens his essay more obliquely, he seems to agree with Peter Wollen's estimation of Godard's general project, for he follows a quotation from Gabriel Marcel as to what cannot be done in the cinema by suggesting that such a notion might have been Godard's provocation – 'Certainly much of the film's force and value comes from its determined attack on pre-conceptions about the nature of cinema and how a film ought to behave.' He then proceeds, less schematically than Peter Wollen, but on the face of it in similar terms, to indicate how Godard changes the behaviour of films. However great divergences soon appear in what the two writers bring to light. Rather than exposing oppositions, Victor Perkins's description of the aesthetic devices at work in *Vivre sa Vie* is increasingly infiltrated by the values of a cinematic practice that in Peter Wollen's terms – and one initially supposed in his own – Godard is setting out to attack.

The nature of this process and the basic similarity in the ideas dealt with by the two writers can be clearly seen if we set some of the terms they use one after the other:

1. Victor Perkins:

the narrative with its leaps in time, its *arbitrary* succession of incident. . . . [my italics – also below].

Peter Wollen:

Narrative transitivity v narrative intransitivity. (One thing follows another v gaps and interruptions, episodic construction, undigested digression.)

2. Victor Perkins:

(the camera) . . . ignores the demands of 'logic' and the *expectations* of the audience.

Peter Wollen:

Identification v estrangement. (Empathy, emotional involvement with a character v direct address, multiple and divided characters, commentary.)

3. Victor Perkins:

the *gratuitous* nature of camera-work . . . defies any notion

of *natural harmony* between action and presentation.

Peter Wollen:

Transparency v foregrounding. ('Language wants to be overlooked – Siertsema v making the mechanics of the film/text visible and explicit.)

4. Victor Perkins:

the film's refusal to *settle* into any single category . . . the *mismatching* of image and sound-track.

Peter Wollen:

Single diegesis v multiple diegesis. (A unitary homogenous world v heterogeneous worlds. Rupture between different codes and different channels.)

5. Victor Perkins:

Godard's unwillingness to allow the movie the degree of anonymity that a fully *coherent* work assumes . . . he plays with film as he plays with ideas, *very personally* . . .

Peter Wollen:

Closure v aperture. (A self-contained object, harmonised within its own bounds v open-endedness, overspill, inter-textuality – allusion, quotation, and parody.)

This procedure, by which one set of techniques is described as transgressing another, recalls the critical practice for which Michel Cegarra reproaches Metz in the *Cinéthique* article recently translated in *Screen*:

The crowning feat of this criticism consists in attributing to the theory one wishes to refute, all the characteristics of its anti-theory, the one being defended; and this in order to reject the first one all the more drastically. . . \*

In the process of interpretation this submerged value system takes over. So having accurately described Godard's devices for narrative disconnection and anti-illusionism, Victor Perkins proceeds to establish in terms of meaning, a hidden coherence, the expression of a romantic, despairing nostalgia for a lost order; disconnection at the formal level is forced to imply a thematic connection of absences:

Such deliberation is in the chaos of the surface, so *emphatic* is the conjunction of incompatible elements, that the film seems to aspire to a level of vision at which everything would become intelligible and coherent.

Not surprisingly, Victor Perkins finds Godard's treatment of this theme superficial. Similarly, having 'the film's refusal to settle into a single category', he later insists that its 'greatest strength lies

\* Michel Cegarra, 'Cinema and Semiology' in *Screen*, v 14 no 1/2, 1973, p 143.

70 in its examination of a temperament', and accuses Godard of not providing adequate information for a complex case-study.

This anomaly comes about because, in describing how Godard changes the behaviour of films, Victor Perkins fails to ask what preconceptions about the nature of the cinema Godard is attacking or what critical values and the critical assumptions are implicated in the challenge; the cinematic consequences of the strategies he describes are missing. The reason for this lies in a conception of formal device that enables him to ask directly 'What does this mean?' rather than pose Peter Wollen's more circumspect question 'How does it work?' It is significant that Victor Perkins appears to accept the distancing techniques of Brecht and Bresson on the grounds that they can be used as a means 'to clarify or emphasise a central thesis'; 'formal device is justified when it allows unimpeded access to content,' and all that Godard's 'attack on preconceptions about the nature of cinema' add up to is a 'fresh approach' that 'betrays' him into making silly or inadequate statements about the world.

Peter Wollen clarifies the nature of this demand when identifying Godard's methods for attacking it:

From the seventeenth century onwards, language was increasingly seen as an instrument which should efface itself in the performance of its task – the conveyance of meaning. Meaning, in its turn, was regarded as representation of the world.

Given that Godard's cinema is an attack on this aesthetic, formal device must be his means of aesthetic action, of breaking established modes for representing the world to allow the discovery of unsuspected meanings. The question Peter Wollen asks of formal device, 'How does it work?' enables us to determine its function in the inter-play of devices, its action on the spectator, the kind of meanings it allows and those it eliminates. Thus of Godard's disruption of narrative continuity and use of estrangement techniques Peter Wollen suggests, 'It raises directly the question, "What is this film for?", superimposed on the orthodox narrative questions, "Why did that happen?" and "What is going to happen next?"' The ideological implications of limiting meaning to representation of the world according to those conventions by which we recognise 'life and reality' emerge in the way Victor Perkins's aesthetic criteria which are vested in a firmly entrenched moral system, allow only certain views of the world to be meaningful. Thus, for example, in Peter Wollen's terms the film's refusal of consistency and coherence opens up new sources of meaning by bringing together a 'plurality of worlds' with the consequent confrontation of different codes, different meanings. Within this framework new perspectives on old realities are made possible; the film can explore 'areas of contradiction', of 'misunderstanding'. Against this Victor Perkins's complaint that 'there is certainly

nothing on the film's affirmative side to balance the pointless brutality of the final scene', ignores the function of narrative discontinuity – production of active meanings rather than moral conclusions – and indicates a closure of thought; his demand that the 'opposition between cold reason and blind agitation' should be mediated by certain 'alternatives' comes close to stipulating that the world be shown with optimism. (Thomas Hardy, a writer Godard seems to have some sympathy for, was similarly attacked – a pointer, perhaps, to the tradition in which Victor Perkins's criticism is located.)

A similar process marks his approach to the film's heroine. Godard's characters, 'incoherent, fissured, interrupted, multiple and self-critical' in Peter Wollen's description, provide a further locus for contradiction. Consistent motivation is lacking and hence the meanings derivable from character analysis and the moral judgement that goes with it. When Victor Perkins tries to impose this kind of reading on the film he finds Nana evasive of responsibilities, complacent, shallow in relationships and attempting to over-simplify life. In this aesthetic it is only a short step from the inadequacy of the character to the inadequacy of the director, for it is his controlling presence that must unify and take responsibility for all views expressed in the film, while the credibility of the created world depends on his feigning anonymity, submitting to the 'discipline' of his material. 'By presenting as a film a series of sketches for a film, Godard protects himself from having to make a complete statement about any of his subjects' – while the credibility of the created world depends on his feigning anonymity, submitting to the 'discipline' of his material.

But it is precisely this restriction that Godard must break if he is to 'attack our preconceptions about the cinema', and break open the enclosed world of narrative theme and character. In counter-posing the two aesthetics Peter Wollen suggests new possible areas of meaning. Instead of an aesthetic for 'representation of the world' we have 'writing in images', the possibility of ideas and argument in film; instead of meanings derived from identification and involvement, we have a 'dynamic relationship' between audience and film, reflexivity. Finally instead of the author being confined to the role of single, yet hidden expressing agent, he gains a new freedom by becoming one among a 'plurality of speaking voices'; in these terms the story from Poe read at the end of the film, released from the demand for pertinence either to Nana's personal relationship, or Godard's supposed moral theme, can become again a potentially rich source of meaning.

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Peter Wollen's theoretical categories are valuable because being clearly articulated, they are there to be understood and contested; they provide a structure against which Godard's formal devices can

72 be placed, rationally examined and questioned; they posit a firm relation between two opposing practices so that the critic/reader/student can enter the debate at any point. The strain revealed in Victor Perkins's attempt to force a practical criticism, without carrying his articulation of the critical issues through, is itself an indication of the falsity of the current practice in this country that would see criticism as separate from 'theory', and equate criticism with the recreation of texts.

This issue is raised again more crucially by the BFI Godard Study Unit where the educational implications of such critical activity cannot be evaded. The unit consists of a long introduction to and survey of Godard's work by Steve Crofts, including analyses of films from which study extracts are taken; information from the Study Extract Catalogue about these extracts; Christopher Williams's article, 'Politics and Production: Some Pointers through the Work of Jean-Luc Godard', reprinted from *Screen*, v 12 n 4, Winter 1971/2; biographical details, filmography, select bibliography and a list of 16 mm distributors. The critical/educational question centres largely on Steve Crofts' editorial role and his own introduction.

The study or teaching of Godard must entail conceptual activity if it is to be at all productive, and given the present bias in our education system towards personal feeling and sensitivity. Ideas and concepts must be taught. Basic information is needed, ideas have to be introduced and clarified, a certain terminology must be presented, critical questions identified; and in the first instance the teacher/student needs to know the issues involved in undertaking the study at all. The unit compiler's task is to find the materials that best demonstrate these motivating issues or provide information necessary to their understanding and then to undertake the editorial function of continual justification and sign-posting of the material. He should have some idea of the likely educational contexts he is addressing – for this the BFI is responsible when commissioning the unit – and having justified the materials, provide some indication of possible usages and developments.

This editorial function is entirely lacking in Steve Crofts' handling of the Godard Study Unit. At no point is consciousness of the teacher or his problems registered – except perhaps in the provision of the list of 16 mm distributors. Christopher Williams's article is simply appended without explanation and the section, 'Notes on the Study Extracts', is treated by Steve Crofts as an opportunity for lengthy commentaries on individual films. For the most part he deals with the extracts as moments in complete films, giving little indication of what issues they raise in isolation for people who have not seen the rest of the film – for example his comment on the extract from *Weekend*:

The extract sequence is *Weekend's* focal point and thematic climax.

Occurring two thirds of the way through the film, it includes recapitulatory flashbacks to earlier scenes and one anticipatory flash forward to the hippy guerrillas. It has a dual function, attacking bourgeois ideology both on the direct political level and on the aesthetic. As already suggested, each prong of this attack operates through the principle of inversion . . . (BFI Study Unit, No 15, p 42)

or on the extract from *Pierrot le Fou*:

At the point in the film from which the extract is taken, the Romantic ideology Ferdinand embodies is beginning to crack. The idyll in the sun is becoming a prison. The incompatibility of the Romantic intellectual and the instinctual woman in love with adventures becomes manifest . . . (BFI Study Unit, No 15, p 53).

What is clear here, is that in order to make sense of the use of film extracts a very different critical activity is needed from the one that seeks to 'explain' films. For the problem Steve Crofts poses teacher and student is not simply their lack of knowledge of what precedes and follows the extract but their dependency on his interpretation of this unknown material if they are to make any use of these comments on the extract itself.

The problems revealed in the presentation of extract material are intensified in the long introduction Steve Crofts offers as the starting point of the study. For he has seen the writing of an introduction as an opportunity for producing his own appreciation of Godard's work, one more study to add to those listed in the bibliography. His course is set by his opening accolade:

Godard; *enfant terrible* of the post-war cinema. Construing liberty as the freedom 'to do what one wants when one wants' he has produced a body of films more audacious and radical than that of any director since Griffith.

There follows a long, diffuse survey of Godard's work which mixes description of some of the formal features of his films, with interpretation of content, details of Godard's working methods, quotations from interviews and criticism, and analysis of moments in his biography. Some of the interpretation is contentious, particularly where it depends on Godard's personal life – 'The explanation of these developments lies in his relationship with Anna Karina . . . his films chronicle their relationship and his attitudes towards her' (p 21); some of the description is confusing – formalism seems to be equated with 'the lure of abstract beauty' (p 49), for example. But the main point is that the issues are completely submerged beneath the temptation to take on the, admittedly prevalent, critical role of creator/entertainer and dominate rather than open up debate; (and in this respect Steve Crofts's evident sympathy for Godard is of no service to him, merely naturalising the sub-

74 merging of issues.) The teacher faced with this introduction must take on the editorial function that is lacking; in other words read through the text, pencil in hand, and tease out the main points and questions raised. He could ask why he should do this for Steve Crofts rather than for Philip French, Richard Roud and others; and he could also ask what this introduction adds of value for the teacher to the article by Christopher Williams, appended at the end, where issues *are* separated out in half the space, and in terms of information, ideas and concepts available for discussion.

The comparison between Victor Perkins' and Peter Wollen's essays reveal radical differences in critical practice and the pressing need for the recognition and articulation of theoretical and ideological positions if the project of practical criticism is to cross the boundaries set up by the appearance of a new cinema and new knowledge. The examination of the BFI Study Unit reveals the educational invalidity and ideological complicity of a critical practice that ignores this need and blurs the issues in presenting the cause of the new cinema in terms of a practice belonging to the old. Above all the analysis in the Study Unit offers a concrete example of the inextricable relations between theory, criticism and education.

Edward Buscombe

The auteur theory was never, in itself, a theory of the cinema, though its originators did not claim that it was. The writers of *Cahiers du Cinéma* always spoke of '*la politique des auteurs*', The translation of this into 'the auteur theory' appears to be the responsibility of Andrew Sarris. In an essay entitled 'Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962' he remarked, 'Henceforth, I will abbreviate "*la politique des auteurs*" as the *auteur* theory to avoid confusion.'<sup>1</sup> Confusion was exactly what followed when the newly christened 'theory' was regarded by many of its supporters and opponents alike as a total explanation of the cinema.

Not only was the original *politique* of *Cahiers* somewhat less than a theory; it was itself only loosely based upon a theoretical approach to the cinema which was never to be made fully explicit. The *politique*, as the choice of term indicates, was polemical in intent and was meant to define an attitude to the cinema and a course of action. In the pursuit of this course *Cahiers* did inevitably reveal some of the theory on which the *politique* was based; but usually this appeared incidentally, and at times incoherently.

One thing is clear, however. From the beginning *Cahiers*, and its predecessor *La Revue du Cinéma*, were committed to the line that the cinema was an art of personal expression. (In the second issue of *La Revue* an article appeared entitled: '*La création doit être l'ouvrage d'un seul*'). At that period (the late 1940s) it was inevitable that part of the project of a new film magazine would be to raise the cultural status of the cinema. The way to do this, it seemed, was to advance the claim of the cinema to be an art form like painting or poetry, offering the individual the freedom of personal expression. The main difference at that time between *Cahiers* and other film magazines was that *Cahiers* did not feel that opportunities of this kind were to be found exclusively in the European 'art' cinema. Right from the very earliest issues there are discussions of Hollywood directors such as Welles, Ford and Lang. *Cahiers* was concerned to raise not only the status of the cinema in general, but of American cinema in particular, by elevating its directors to the ranks of the artists.

The *politique* in the sense of a line that will be rigorously pursued and provocatively expressed, really dates from an article in issue no 31 by François Truffaut entitled '*Une certaine tendance*

\* This article is a revision of a paper given at a BFI/SEFT seminar in Spring 1973, entitled 'The Idea of Authorship'



*du cinéma français*'. Truffaut attacks what he calls the tradition of quality in the French cinema, by which he means the films of directors such as Delannoy, Allégret and Autant-Lara, and especially the adaptations by Aurenche and Bost of well-known novels. They are attacked for being literary, not truly cinematic, and are also found guilty of 'psychological realism'. Truffaut defines a true film *auteur* as one who brings something genuinely personal to his subject instead of merely producing a tasteful, accurate but lifeless rendering of the original material. Examples of true *auteurs* are Bresson and Renoir. Instead of merely transferring someone else's work faithfully and self-effacingly, the *auteur* transforms the material into an expression of his own personality.

So successful was Truffaut's call to arms, and so many were the *auteurs* subsequently discovered, that in all the later articles in *Cahiers* in which the 'politique' was explicitly discussed, a great deal of space had to be devoted to dissociating the journal from the excesses committed in its name. (See, for example, issues nos 63, 70, 126, 172). Truffaut had referred only to French directors, but *Cahiers* began to give more and more space to the American cinema. In its special issue nos 150-1 on the American cinema no fewer than 120 *cinéastes* (ie *auteurs*) were identified.

Yet even by this late date (1964) the questions of what an *auteur* is and why the cinema should be discussed largely in terms of individual artists are ones that are only answered by implication. Clear articulations of a theory behind the practice are rare and sketchy. But a review by André Bazin of *The Red Badge of Courage* (no 27, p 49 f) gives a clue. Bazin distinguishes between Hitchcock, a true *auteur*, and Huston, who is only a *metteur en scène*, who has 'no truly personal style'. Huston merely adapts, though often very skilfully, the material given him, instead of transforming it into something genuinely his own. A similar point is made by Jacques Rivette in a later issue (no 126), in the course of a discussion on criticism. Rivette declares that Minnelli is not a true *auteur*, merely a talented director at the mercy of his script. With a bad script he makes a bad and uninteresting film. Fritz Lang, on the other hand, can somehow transform even indifferent material into something personal to him (and this, Rivette assumes, makes it interesting).

Such discussions, however, do not advance much beyond Truffaut's original position, though they serve to confirm *Cahiers*' stance on the issue of personal expression. Some attempt to modify this was made by Eric Rohmer. Rejecting the lunatic fringe who took the issue of personality to extremes, Rohmer writes, '*Le film est pour lui [the auteur] une architecture dont les pierres ne sont pas - ne doivent pas être - filles de sa propre chair*'.<sup>2</sup> The comparison with architecture, another industrial art, would seem to lead in a different direction from comparisons with literature, the best known of which is, of course, Alexandre Astruc's article

'The Birth of a New Avant Garde: *La Caméra-Style*'.<sup>3</sup> But it was Astruc's article which was to prove more influential over the critics of *Cahiers*. The more Romantic conception of the director as the 'only begetter' of a film was the one that dominated the journal.

One expression of this which seems particularly indebted to Romantic artistic theory is that of Rivette in issue no 126: '*Un cinéaste, qui a fait dans le passé de très grands films, peut faire des erreurs, mais les erreurs qu'il fera ont toutes chances, a priori\*, d'être plus passionnantes que les réussites d'un confectionneur*'.<sup>4</sup> What seems to lie behind such a statement is the notion of the 'divine spark' which separates off the artist from ordinary mortals, which divides the genius from the journeyman. All the articles by Truffaut, Bazin and Rivette from which I have quoted share this belief in the absolute distinction between *auteur* and *metteur en scène*, between *cinéaste* and 'confectionneur', and characterise it in terms of the difference between the *auteur's* ability to make a film truly his own, ie a kind of original, and the *metteur en scène's* inability to disguise the fact that the origin of his film lies somewhere else.

When this is compared with a statement from early Romantic literary theory, it is easy enough to see the derivation of this distinction:

'An Original may be said to be of a *vegetable* nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it grows, it is not made; Imitations are often a sort of *manufacture*, wrought up by those *mechanics*, art and labour, out of pre-existent materials not their own.'<sup>5</sup>

It's not surprising, therefore, to find that *auteur* critics draw others of their assumptions from Romantic theorists. For example, Coleridge makes a distinction between two kinds of literature which makes use of the metaphor of organic unity contained in the above passage: 'The plays of Beaumont and Fletcher are mere aggregations without unity; in the Shakespearean drama there is a vitality which grows and evolves itself from within – a keynote which guides and controls the harmonies throughout.'<sup>6</sup> This notion of the unity produced by the personality of the *auteur* is central to the *Cahiers'* position; but it is made even more explicit by their American apologist, Andrew Sarris: 'The *auteur* critic is obsessed with the wholeness of art and the artist. He looks at a film as a whole, a director as a whole. The parts, however entertaining individually, must cohere meaningfully.'<sup>7</sup> The work of a *metteur en scène* will never be more than the sum of its parts, and probably less. The *auteur's* personality, on the other hand, endows his

\* It's hard to see how this can be so *a priori* in any case; only according to the balance of probabilities.

78 work with organic unity. The belief that all directors must be either *auteurs* or *metteurs en scène* led inevitably to a kind of apartheid, according to which, as Rivette says, the failures of the *auteurs* will be more interesting than the successes of the rest. Another formulation of what is essentially the same distinction occurs in *Cahiers* no 172:

*l'être doué du moindre talent esthétique, si sa personnalité 'éclate' dans l'oeuvre, l'emportera sur le technicien le plus avisé. Nous découvrons qu'il n'y pas de règles. L'intuition, la sensibilité, triomphent de toutes théories.*<sup>8</sup>

Whether this zeal to divide directors into the company of the elect on the right and a company of the damned on the left owes anything to the Catholic influence in *Cahiers* is hard to say at this distance; but what can be identified, yet again, is the presence of Romantic artistic theory in the opposition of intuition and rules, sensibility and theory.

This tendency in *Cahiers* to make a totem of the personality of the *auteur* went to such extremes that every now and again the editors felt the need to redress the balance. Andre Bazin, writing in issue no 70, introduces a different perspective:

The evolution of Western art towards greater personalisation should definitely be considered as a step forward, but only so long as this individualisation remains only a final perfection and does not claim to *define* culture. At this point, we should remember that irrefutable commonplace we learnt at school: the individual transcends society, but society is also and above all *within* him. So there can be no definitive criticism of genius or talent which does not first take into consideration the social determinism, the historical combination of circumstances, and the technical background which to a large extent determines it.<sup>9</sup>

Bazin, as Rohmer had done before, takes up the analogy of architecture:

'If you will excuse yet another commonplace, the cinema is an art which is both popular and industrial. These conditions, which are necessary to its existence, in no way constitute a collection of hindrances – no more than in architecture – they rather represent a group of positive and negative circumstances which have to be reckoned with.'<sup>10</sup>

To be fair, *Cahiers* never entirely forgot these commonplaces, and quite frequently ran articles on the organisation of the film industry, on film genres (such as Bazin's own 'The Evolution of the Western' in December 1955) and on the technology of the cinema. The development of '*la politique des auteurs*' into a cult of personality gathers strength with the emergence of Andrew Sarris, for it is Sarris who pushes to extremes arguments which in

Sarris, for example, rejects Bazin's attempt to combine the *auteur* approach with an acknowledgement of the forces conditioning the individual artist. Arguing strongly against any kind of historical determinism, Sarris states:

' Even if the artist does not spring from the idealised head of Zeus, free of the embryonic stains of history, history itself is profoundly affected by his arrival. If we cannot imagine Griffith's *October* or Eisenstein's *Birth of a Nation* because we find it difficult to transpose one artist's unifying conceptions of Lee and Lincoln to the other's dialectical conceptions of Lenin and Kerensky, we are nevertheless compelled to recognise other differences in the personalities of these two pioneers beyond their respective cultural complexes. It is with these latter differences that the *auteur* theory is most deeply concerned. If directors and other artists cannot be wrenched from their historical environments, aesthetics is reduced to a subordinate branch of ethnography.'<sup>11</sup>

(Pauline Kael is for once correct to write of this: ' And when is Sarris going to discover that aesthetics is indeed a branch of ethnography; what does he think it is – a sphere of its own, separate from the study of man and his environment?'<sup>12</sup> But her own confusion re-emerges later in the same essay when she remarks, ' Criticism is an art, not a science . . .'<sup>13</sup> Is ethnography, then, not a science?).

If Sarris is not saying that genius is independent of time and place, then he comes dangerously close to it. The critic's task as he sees it is to scan the cinema for signs of 'personality', and having found them to mine the film so as to bring as much as possible of it to the surface. It is not his job to explain how it got there. He is canny enough to remain aware that his position is partly determined by the need to maintain a polemic, both against those who are contemptuous of the American cinema and against the crudities of 'mass media critics'. ('*Auteur* criticism is a reaction against sociological criticism that enthroned the *what* against the *how*.'<sup>14</sup> But this awareness does not save him from being driven further and further into an untenable position. That position is reached, I think, when he writes in his essay of 1962: 'The second premise of the *auteur* theory is the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value. Over a group of films a director must exhibit certain recurring characteristics of style which serve as his signature.'<sup>15</sup> Here, surely, is a fatal flaw in Sarris's argument, and the sleight of hand he uses to cover it cannot disguise its vulnerability. He is attempting to make the *auteur* theory perform two functions at the same time. On the one hand, it is a method of classification. Sarris talks elsewhere about the value of the theory as a way of ordering film history, or

80 a tool for producing a map of the cinema, and no-one could deny that in this sense the theory has, whatever its faults, been extremely productive, as a map should be, in opening up unexplored territory. But at the same time Sarris also requires the theory to act as a means of measuring value. Films, he is saying, become valuable insofar as they reveal directorial personality. He therefore does precisely what Bazin said should not be done: he uses individuality as a test of cultural value. It's worth noting that Sarris is not consistent in practising what he preaches, for several directors whose work undoubtedly exhibits a high degree of personality do not rank very far up the league tables of *The American Cinema*. Kazan, Wilder, Dassin, even Brian Forbes, all produce films easily recognisable as 'theirs' which are not rated by Sarris.

As one means, among others, of classifying films, the *auteur* theory has proved its usefulness. But to assert that personality is the criterion of value seems altogether more open to question. The assumption that individuality and originality are valuable in themselves is, as Bazin points out in '*La Politique des Auteurs*', derived from Romantic artistic theory. Sarris goes further; 'the *auteur* theory values the personality of the director precisely because of the barriers to its expression.'<sup>16</sup> In *Culture and Society* Raymond Williams describes the way in which aesthetic theory came in the Romantic period to see the artist as essentially opposed to society, achieving personal expression in the face of a hostile environment and valuing it all the more for this.<sup>17</sup> Sarris is directly in this tradition.

Sarris, like *Cahiers* before him, then uses this criterion of value as a means of raising the status of American cinema. He admits that in Hollywood there are pressures which might work against individual expression. But so there are elsewhere:

All directors, and not just in Hollywood, are imprisoned by the conditions of their craft and their culture. The reason foreign directors are almost invariably given more credit for creativity is that the local critic is never aware of all the influences operating in a foreign environment. The late Robert Warshaw treated Carl Dreyer as a solitary artist and Leo McCarey as a social agent, but we know now that there were cultural influences in Denmark operating on Dreyer. *Day of Wrath* is superior by any standard to *My Son John*, but Dreyer is not that much freer an artist than McCarey. Dreyer's chains are merely less visible from our vantage point across the Atlantic.<sup>18</sup>

Taken at face value this is unexceptionable; of course no director has total freedom, and there is no reason *a priori* why American cinema should not be as good as any other. And in fact, says Sarris, it is better:

After years of tortured revaluation, I am now prepared to stake my critical reputation, such as it is, on the proposition that

Alfred Hitchcock is artistically superior to Robert Bresson by every criterion of excellence, and further that, film for film, the American cinema has been consistently superior to that of the rest of the world from 1915 through 1962. Consequently, I now regard the *auteur* theory primarily as a critical device for recording the history of the American cinema, the only cinema in the world worth exploring in depth beneath the frosting of a few great directors on top.<sup>19</sup>

Again, this in itself is fair enough; the problem is that, having obtained our easy assent to the proposition that all film-makers are subject to conditions, he appears, by a sleight of hand, to proceed on the assumption that therefore conditions are unimportant. America can produce film artists, in just the same way as Europe, but more of them, and of a higher standard. Film history is for Sarris the history of *auteurs*. The acknowledgement of 'conditions' turns out to be mere lip service. And it is not, I think, difficult to see why: if personality is the criterion of value, and can be achieved in the face of 'conditions', then it is not the critic's job to be much concerned with them.

One obvious objection to employing individuality as a test of value is that a director could well be highly individual, but a bad director. In the first edition of *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* Peter Wollen does not seem wholly to avoid this trap. In the chapter on the *auteur* theory he writes:

My own view is that Ford's work is much richer\* than that of Hawkes and that this is revealed by a structural analysis; it is the richness of the shifting relations between antinomies in Ford's work that makes him a great artist, beyond being simply an undoubted *auteur*. Moreover, the *auteur* theory enables us to reveal a whole complex of meaning in films such as *Donovan's Reef*, which a recent filmography sums up as just 'a couple of Navy men who have retired to a South Sea island now spend most of their time raising hell.'<sup>20</sup>

There is no doubt that films such as *Donovan's Reef*, *Wings of Eagles* and especially *The Sun Shines Bright* (almost indecipherable to those unacquainted with Ford's work) do reveal a great deal of meaning when seen in the context of Ford's work as a whole. But does this make them 'good' films as well as interesting ones? The question is worth asking, because it seems to be just this smuggling in of one thing under the guise of another that is most responsible for the reputation in some quarters of the *auteur* theory as merely the secret password of an exclusive and fanatical sect.

Possibly people such as Pauline Kael who are roused to fury by

\* Possibly by 'richer' Wollen does not imply 'has greater aesthetic value'; but if that is the case his terminology is a little confusing.

82 Sarris's version of the *auteur* theory should simply be left to stew in their own juice. And perhaps those who won't accept that *Wings of Eagles* is a good film have a very narrow concept of what is good and are unreasonable in demanding that all films should have formal perfection, should be 'intelligent', 'adult', etc. But the *auteur* theory becomes more tenable in fact it is not required to carry in its baggage the burden of being an evaluative criterion. And Wollen, in the third edition of his book, dumps it along with much else\*:

At this point, it is necessary to say something about the *auteur* theory since this has often been seen as a way of introducing the idea of the creative personality into the Hollywood cinema. Indeed, it is true that many protagonists of the *auteur* theory do argue this way. However, I do not hold this view and I think it is important to detach the *auteur* theory from any suspicion that it simply represents a 'cult of personality' or apotheosis of the director. To my mind the *auteur* theory actually represents a radical break with the idea of an 'art' cinema, not the transplant of traditional ideas about art into Hollywood. The 'art' cinema is rooted in the idea of creativity and the film as the expression of an individual vision. What the *auteur* theory argues is that any film, certainly a Hollywood film, is a network of different statements, crossing and contradicting each other, elaborated into a final 'coherent' version. Like a dream, the film the spectator sees is, so to speak, the 'film facade', the end product of 'secondary revision', which hides and masks the process which remains latent in the film's 'unconscious' . . . by a process of comparison with other films, it is possible to decipher, not a coherent message or world-view, but a structure which underlies the film and shapes it, gives it a certain pattern of energy cathexis. It is this structure which *auteur* analysis disengages from the film.

The structure is associated with a single director, an individual, not because he has played the role of artist, expressing himself or his own vision in the film, but because it is through the force of his preoccupations that an unconscious, unintended meaning can be decoded in the film, usually to the surprise of the individual concerned . . . It is wrong, in the name of a denial of the traditional idea of creative subjectivity, to deny any status to individuals at all. But Fuller or Hawks or Hitchcock, the directors, are quite separate from 'Fuller' or 'Hawks' or 'Hitchcock', the structures named after them, and should not be methodologically confused.<sup>21</sup>

\* The virtual obsession with aesthetic – even moral – evaluation which has characterised so much British criticism undoubtedly gave the *auteur* theory much of its appeal. (It's hard to ascribe moral value to say, the studio system.).

Auteur theory cannot simply be applied indiscriminately. Nor does an auteur analysis exhaust what can be said about any single film. It does no more than provide one way of decoding a film, by specifying what its mechanics are at one level. There are other kinds of code that could be proposed, and whether they are of any value or not will have to be settled by reference to the text, to the films in question.<sup>22</sup>

There is much in this position that is attractive. It satisfies our sense that on the one hand the American cinema is the richest field for study, and on the other hand that the more one knows about its habitual methods of working the less it becomes possible to conceive of Hollywood as populated by autonomous geniuses. And certainly *a priori* evidence suggests that the themes of transferred guilt in Hitchcock, of home, and the desert/garden antithesis in Ford, for example, are almost entirely unconscious, making it inappropriate to speak, as so much *auteur* criticism does, about a director's world view (and especially about the moral worth of that world view). And the avoidance of the problem of evaluation is surely justified until we have an adequate description of what we should evaluate.

Structural analysis of *auteurs* has produced important results, not least in Wollen's own book. Yet there are surely problems in using techniques which were developed for the analysis of forms of communications which are entirely unconscious such as dreams, myths and language itself. For what is the exact relation between the structure called 'Hitchcock' and the film director called Hitchcock, who actually makes decisions about the story, the acting, the sets, the camera placing? It is possible to reveal structures in Hitchcock's work which are by no means entirely unconscious, such as the use of certain camera angles to involve and implicate the audience in the action. Hitchcock remarks about *The Wrong Man*:

The whole approach is subjective. For instance, they've slipped on a pair of handcuffs to link him to another prisoner. During the journey between the station house and the prison, there are different men guarding him, but since he's ashamed, he keeps his head down, staring at his shoes, so we never show the guards.<sup>23</sup>

This kind of thing occurs in almost all Hitchcock's films, and so could be said to identify him as an *auteur* in the traditional sense. But it also connects to his obsessional and no doubt largely unconscious (till he read about it) concern with guilt and voyeurism, which have been revealed in structural analysis.

Earlier versions of the *auteur* theory made the assumption that because there was meaning in a work someone must have deliberately put it there, and that someone must be the *auteur*.



84 Wollen rightly resists that. But this doesn't mean that one can only talk about unconscious structures (admittedly Wollen does say it is wrong to deny any status to individuals at all, but is there not something a little disingenuous in this concession?). The conscious will and talent of the artist (for want of a better word) may still be allowed some part, surely. But of course, that conscious will and talent are also in turn the product of those forces that act upon the artist, and it is here that traditional *auteur* theory most seriously breaks down. As Sam Rohdie says:

*Auteurs* are out of time. The theory which makes them sacred makes no inroad on vulgar history, has no concepts for the social or the collective, or the national.

The primary act of *auteur* criticism is one of dissociation – the *auteur* out of time and history and society is also freed from any productive process, be it in Los Angeles or Paris.<sup>24</sup>

The test of a theory is whether it produces new knowledge. The *auteur* theory produced much, but of a very partial kind, and much it left totally unknown. What is needed now is a theory of the cinema that locates directors in a total situation, rather than one which assumes that their development has only an internal dynamic. This means that we should jettison such loaded terms as 'organic', which inevitably suggest that a director's work derives its impetus from within. All such terms reveal often unformulated and always unwarranted assumptions about the cinema; a film is not a living creature, but a product brought into existence by the operation of a complex of forces upon a body of matter. Unfortunately, criticism which deals with only one aspect of the artistic object is easier to practice than that which seeks to encompass the totality. Three approaches seem possible, and each of them must inevitably squeeze out the *auteur* from his position of prominence, and transform the notion of him which remains. First, there is the examination of the effects of the cinema on society (research into the sociology of mass media, and so on). Second is the effect of society on the cinema; in other words, the operation of ideology, economics, technology, etc. Lastly, and this is in a sense only a sub-section of the preceding category, the effects of films on other films; this would especially involve questions of genre, which only means that some films have a very close relation to other films. But all films are affected by the previous history of the cinema. This is only one more thing that traditional *auteur* theory could not cope with. It identified the code of the *auteur*; but was silent on those codes intrinsic to the cinema, as well as to those originating outside it.

#### Notes

1. *Film Culture*, no 27 (Winter 1962-3). Reprinted in *Perspectives on the Study of Film*, editor John Stuart Katz, Boston 1971 (p 129) Sarris later conceded, 'Ultimately, the *auteur* theory is not so much

- a theory as an attitude, a table of values that converts film history into directorial biography.' *The American Cinema* (New York, 1968) p 30.
2. 'For the *auteur*, the film is a piece of architecture whose bricks are not – must not be – the children of his own body.' *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no 63, p 55.
  3. Alexandre Astruc, 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: 'La Caméra-Stylo,' reprinted in *The New Wave*, editor Peter Graham (Secker & Warburg, 1968).
  4. 'A *cinéaste* who has made great films in the past may make mistakes, but his mistakes will have every chance of being, *a priori*, more impressive than the successes of a "manufacturer".' *Cahiers*, no 126, p 17. The same idea is to be found in Sarris, in *The American Cinema*, p 17: 'the worst film of a great director may be more interesting than the best film of a fair to middling director.'
  5. Quoted in Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (Penguin, 1961), p 54.
  6. S. T. Coleridge, *Lectures* 1818.
  7. *The American Cinema*, p 30.
  8. *Cahiers*, no 172, p 3 'a man endowed with the least aesthetic talent, if his personality "shines out" in the work, will be more successful than the cleverest technician. We discover that there are no rules. Intuition and sensibility triumph over all theories.'
  9. Andre Bazin, *La Politique des Auteurs*, translated in *The New Wave*, p 142.
  10. *Ibid.*
  11. Sarris, in Katz, *op cit*, pp 132-3.
  12. Pauline Kael, 'Circles and Squares: Joys and Sarris', in Katz, *op cit*, p 154.
  13. *Ibid.*, p 142.
  14. Sarris, *The American Cinema*, p 36.
  15. Sarris, in Katz, *op cit*, p 137.
  16. Sarris, *The American Cinema*, p 31.
  17. See Williams, *op cit*, pp 48-64, and *passim*.
  18. Sarris, *The American Cinema*, p 36.
  19. Sarris in Katz, *op cit*, p 134.
  20. Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, Secker & Warburg, 3rd edition, 1972, p 102.
  21. *Ibid.*, pp 167-8.
  22. *Ibid.*, p 168.
  23. François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, Panther ed (1969), p 296.
  24. Sam Rohdie, 'Education and Criticism' *Screen*, v 12 n 1 p 10.

Stephen Heath

Edward Buscombe's paper outlines clearly the issues raised by the development of the *auteur* theory in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* and in subsequent extensions (Sarris) and considerations (Wollen). This comment is intended simply to raise one or two further questions and to shift the perspective a little by offering something of a different articulation of the elements of Buscombe's conclusion.

The idea of authorship carries within it some assumption of the author as originator of discourse: it is as its source that the author is given as a unity of discourse. Immediately, certain qualifications impose themselves. Not all discourse has an author; nor do we demand it, surrounded as we are in our everyday living by a whole tissue of discourse to the varying interweaving strands of which we would not even know how to begin to pose the demands of authorship. These demands are, indeed, limited in relation to film; leaving aside the mass of material presented by television, think merely in this respect of the range of documentary, educational, medical, newsreel works for which only exceptionally do we bring into play any notion of the author. Even within the very area of the book (to which the assumptions and models of authorship are so closely connected), similar kinds of limitation can be seen to apply. Many scientists, for example, produce books; only a very few (a Heisenberg or a Bronowski), however, achieve the accepted status of an author: the validity of science, in fact, is that it is assumed as being without author, nowise particular but a clear and general demonstration of reality (something of the same assumption lies behind conventional conceptions of film documentary, though film also knows a convention of personal documentary, the cineast as witness, — Marker on Cuba). Where the idea of authorship is firmly established, doubts and limitations still persist: how are we to deal with films on which a director — an author — may have been involved in some other capacity (scenarist, assistant director) or which he may have realised in collaboration or to which he may have contributed no more than a brief sequence (Resnais's contribution to *L'an OI*)? What of the problem of *control* which the *auteur* theory confronted in its applications to Hollywood directors? (Similar questions arise with regard to the idea

\* This article is a comment on the paper 'The Idea of Authorship' presented by Edward Buscombe at a BFI/SEFT seminar, Spring 1973, and a revised version of which is published in this issue. References to passages in the seminar paper not included in the revised article are indicated by an asterisk.

Such questions confirm the assumption of the author as originator, as source, and these ideas are then traditionally theorised, more or less sophisticatedly, through notions of the 'creative imagination', of 'personality', 'spontaneity', 'originality', or whatever. As source, the author produces 'works', closed units of discourse from without himself, the series of which will have a further unity that will be available for discussion in terms of the author's development, his 'maturity' and so on. It is these emphases that Buscombe sums up in his complex of genius, originality and organic unity.

What can it mean, however, to speak of the author as a source of discourse? The author is constituted only in language and a language is by definition social, beyond any particular individuality and, as Saussure put it in respect of natural language, 'to be accepted such as it is'. One can see how the question and the objection are, in fact, answered in the distinction between language and discourse, between general *langue* and singular usage. There is support for this in linguistics in the recognition formulated by Jakobson of increased freedom in individual language use proportionate to the increased size of the linguistic unit: in the combination of distinctive traits into phonemes, the user's liberty is nil; in the combination of phonemes into words, his liberty is heavily circumscribed; in the formation of sentences, he is much less constrained, though his 'creativity' depends on the formal constraint of the set of syntactic structures that transformational generative grammar seeks to describe in its model of competence; in the combination of sentences into blocks of discourse, finally, his liberty grows very substantially indeed and so the sentence becomes the upper limit of linguistics as a science, the threshold beyond which lies the individual and hence the unformalisable.

The dangers of this account can be readily seen: it tends to instrumentalise language and it is precisely this instrumentalisation that supports the idea of authorship in its conventional terms; consciousness and language are confused as an immediate unity in the flow of expression (this immediacy of consciousness is that bourgeois conception of 'man' as the punctual subject of history which Marx attacked in, for example, the *German Ideology*; 'man' and 'author' go hand in hand, the latter a particular instance of the former). In connection with cinema, an account of this kind is especially tempting since the straight application of the *langue/parole* model to film has led to the idea of cinema as a realm of pure performance, as being a language without a *langue*, the perfect expressive medium. (Critical discussion of this can be found in various of the articles included in the special issue of *Screen* v 14 n 1/2 on cinesemiotics). Many intuitive accounts of cinema as language depend exactly on this equation of consciousness and instrument in direct expression — Astruc's *caméra-stylo*, as Bus-

88 combe points out, is one instance of this. Classically, the *auteur* theory cannot but confirm this expressionism; the author is constituted *at the expense of* language, of the orders of discourse (he is what the texts can be stripped away to reveal). The effect of this confirmation can be seen at its clearest when the theory functions – and it seems inevitably always finally so to function – as a mode of evaluation.

To combat this, Edward Buscombe proposes other ways of looking at the cinema: '(a) the examination of the effects of the cinema on society (mass media research, etc); (b) the effects of society on the cinema (the influence of ideology, of economics, of history, etc); (c) a sub-division of (b), the effects of films on other films'. There will probably be an overall agreement with these as general emphases of areas with which reflection on cinema should be concerned. What is perhaps limiting is the formulation of these emphases in terms of a simple process of addition, as so many approaches that can be added to *auteur* theory. It would seem rather that the development of these emphases must constitute a radical criticism of *auteur* theory; one cannot merely consider the 'influence of ideology' alongside that theory, retaining both as different 'approaches', for the notion of the author is itself a major ideological construction (like, for example, the 'realism' of film) and any attention to cinema as ideological articulation must come back on that notion and its assumptions. The force of Buscombe's proposals cannot be limited to a plea for a variety of independent and pacific approaches the sum of which will give a better insight into film (better because the disposition of a quantitatively greater number of separate insights); what is in question is the production, through the development of these proposals, of new objects the formalisation of which will provide not so much an insight as a theoretical grasp of film as signifying practice, a new problematic in which traditional notions are radically displaced.

Buscombe's paper effectively recognises the necessity of such a displacement. In relation to the idea of authorship, the theoretical object that the development of such a recognition entails is the *subject*; the need is for the construction of a theory of the subject with regard to the specific signifying practice of film. It is just such a theory that the notion of the author forecloses, determining a history of the cinema (how that history is conceived and written) and the history of cinema (operating an effective determination). Thus, for instance, the liberation of the camera is the evolution of its instrumental perfection (Balzac could declare an exactly similar view towards language); constructed to reproduce the centrality of the subject as punctual source (to sustain the ignorance of his subjection), it is given more and more as the point of his expression: the *subject-author* expresses himself in an immediate independence.

One or two elements of the displacement that a theory of the

subject would operate may be worth briefly mentioning here.

The function of the author (the effect of the idea of authorship) is a function of unity; the use of the notion of the author involves the organisation of the film (as 'work') and, in so doing, it avoids – this is indeed its function – the thinking of the articulation of the film text in relation to ideology. A theory of the subject represents precisely an attempt, at one level, to grasp the constructions of the subject in ideology (the modes of subject-ivity); it thus allows at once the articulation of contradictions in the film text other than in relation to an englobing consciousness, in relation now, that is, to a specific historico-social process, and the recognition of a heterogeneity of structures, codes, languages at work in the film and of the particular positions of the subject they impose. (It is evident that a theory of the subject will then question the simple use of the *langue/parole* model.)

A theory of the subject would provide a way of recasting the problem posed by Buscombe, in the paragraphs immediately preceding his original conclusion,\* concerning the 'either/or choice', conscious or unconscious, 'creative artist' or 'unconscious catalyst' (note that 'unconscious' is here loosely used, with no precise analytical reference). Buscombe writes:

It's quite\* possible to do an *auteur* analysis of, say, Dickens, which would detect the presence of unconscious themes in his work, yet Dickens was far more independent of outside pressures than any Hollywood director has ever been. At the same time, a great deal of Dickens' "meaning" was conscious (as the notes for his novels show). The either/or situation has arisen, it would seem because traditionally it has been felt that for there to be meaning in a work there must be someone who deliberately put the meaning there. Wollen is no doubt quite right to resist this notion. But need we throw out the baby with the bath-water? Can't we say that the films of a director may reveal both an unconscious structure and a meaning which he has put there?

The equation of unconscious themes and outside pressures (with its corollary of conscious intention and independence as the alternative) seems especially significant in the emphases and developments of *auteur* theory. On the one hand, we find ideas of personality, free-wheeling creativity, independent intention; on the other, those of unconscious structures, constraints, effects from 'outside'. In theory, one might assign different procedures to these two emphases: stylistic analysis and structural analysis (of the kind developed by Lévi-Strauss). In practice, *auteur* theory seems to mix the two (the proportions vary as Buscombe shows in his account) in a confused strategy that generally refuses to develop theoretically the results it produces. The themes and shifting antimonies which *auteur* theory so often traces – think, for example, of Wollen's description of Ford and Hawks in the second

90 chapter of *Signs and Meaning* – are ideological formations; it determines, in other words, the particular inscriptions of ideology by a corpus of films (the principle of pertinence for the corpus being that of authorship). If this recognition is held, new problems arise which it becomes increasingly important to consider. One such problem is that of the inscription of the subject in ideological formations and this cannot be formulated simply as the question of 'outside pressures'. Indeed, if we look at the work of Dickens, Buscombe's example\* of a relative freedom from 'outside pressures', it can be seen that it responds to almost every ideological pressure of the age, so much so that it reads as a massive *dispositif* of the ideological formations then current (not a form of discourse that is not somewhere assumed, even where this leads to what is defined as 'contradiction' and finally, in the later texts, overflows the given assumptions of representation to produce something of a frantic – the theme of negation, of endless circulation, of disorientation – dramatisation of the discursive orders of these formations. What is crucial is the focus on the languages, codes, orders of discourse that 'cross' the text and the analysis of the activity it brings to bear on them. The *text*, the new object that provides the necessity for a theory of the subject in relation to film, is precisely the space of the breakdown of the opposition between 'inside' and 'outside', 'dependent' and 'independent' and so on. (For discussion of the notion of *text*, see the first section of Ben Brewster's contribution to the present issue of *Screen*.) Another problem is that of the construction of the ideological subject, the production of the subject as support for ideological formations, and it is here that psychoanalysis plays a fundamental theoretical role as description of the setting in position of the individual subject. As far as the specific practice of film is concerned, it would seem that the psychoanalytical intervention in a general theory of the subject needs at once to be focussed as a critical perspective on the use of the idea of authorship and its assumptions and to be employed to disengage within that idea, and hence to operate its methodological displacement, 'individual' and 'person'; where the latter is the ideological construction of the author, the former marks a configuration of elements, the subject in his particularity the determination of which, its 'history', is the task of psychoanalysis. The interrogation of a group of films within this history is not the revelation of the author but the tracing in the series of texts of the insistence of the unconscious (in the Freudian sense of the term). Such an interrogation meets difficulties similar to those encountered by the attempt to place literary texts in this perspective – absence of analytical situation, associations, transference, etc – and it seems clear that the work that needs to be done at the moment is the close analysis of the systems of particular texts ('textual systems' in Metz's terminology) in relation to the ideological formations they reflect or articulate and the

positions in which they inscribe the subject and, overall, to the whole process of subject and sense in the text. (We need, for example, to begin to reflect on the modes of relation and displacement between subject of *énonciation* and subject of *énoncé* in film.)

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The list of problems could be extended and their consideration, together with that of those mentioned, is the development of that new problematic to which Edward Buscombe's proposals point and within which the question of the *auteur* theory is recast. What then remains, if anything, of that theory? The passage quoted by Buscombe from Wollen's postscript to the revised edition of *Signs and Meaning* perhaps provides one answer, though preceding formulations there tend to pull it back into rather traditional terms, in its distinction of Fuller and 'Fuller': 'But Fuller or Hawks, or Hitchcock, the directors, are quite separate from "Fuller" or "Hawks" or "Hitchcock" the structures named after them, and should not be methodologically confused'. The author, that is may return as a *fiction*, figure – fan of elements – of a certain pleasure which begins to turn the film, or series of films the ones over the others, into a plurality, a play of assemblage and dispersion. Grasped thus, the author, like its corollary the reader as passive receiver, now becomes part of an activity of writing-reading; we come back once again, in other words, to the new object of the text, space of the process of sense and subject.

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Geoffrey Nowell Smith

The May-June 1973 number of *Film Comment* carries an article by Charles Eckert on 'The English Cine-Structuralists'. It will come as no surprise to readers of *Screen* to learn that many of the quoted examples of this English cine (or *auteur*) structuralism are culled from the pages of this journal, while others come from books edited by the BFI Education Department for the 'Cinema One' series. What is more suspect is the way Eckert's trans-Atlantic telescope has discerned a structure (though not a very structural structure) linking into a single school a number of writers, including me, whose own perception of ourselves would be rather as disparate individuals with no particular common identity.

What tempts Eckert to see, or rather to posit, a unity between the cine-structuralists is a combination of two factors: affiliation (from one English writer to the next), and relationship (to the non-English, non-cine structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss). (To be thoroughly structuralist we should perhaps designate these factors, or functions, as co-relation and relation, or as syntagm and paradigm: after all we have a reputation to keep up.) This unity is, however, made quite correctly into the object of criticism. The affiliation is shown to be somewhat loose, and the relationship to Lévi Strauss is seen as eclectic. We are a school, but not a very good one.

Before proceeding to the objections, both of principle and of detail, to the *Film Comment* article, I should make two things clear. First the observations that follow are not to be seen as a defence of English cine (or *auteur*) structuralism against outside criticism. Since it will be implicit in my argument that this form of structuralism does not in fact exist, I can hardly argue on its behalf. Nor should this piece be seen as *Screen's* answer to *Film Comment*. *Screen* does exist and can no doubt take up a position if it wants to, but, as an outsider to the journal, I do not feel that I can be its spokesman. So what follows is, if you like, my personal reply to Charlie Eckert. The *politique* (for the moment) stops there. But there is more to it than that. I am not looking for an individual confrontation. Rather what I shall attempt is a confrontation of two positions: the position I take to be correct and the position that I see as at least implied in his article. The principle point at issue is how one writes about film and how one discusses writing about film. This means a theoretical confrontation. On the majority of empirical points our two positions are not so much opposed as

tangential to each other.

Secondly, although the main burden of this piece is critical, it is only right to begin by acknowledging the merits of Eckert's article, which are many. First of all it succeeds in making some sort of sense of the rather obscure debates that have been going on over here about structuralist/scientific/materialist film criticism/theory. The kind of sense extracted may offend participants in the debate, but there is no *a priori* reason why Eckert should not be right and the rest of us, narcissistically attached to our own image of our literary product, wrong. As it happens, I think that there are better grounds than narcissistic pique for finding his account misleading. But it is up to me to state these grounds, and to state them theoretically in opposition to a scholarly and reasoned presentation of an alternative thesis.

A second specific merit of Eckert's article relates to his treatment of Lévi-Strauss. It should be conceded at the outset that many of us who have made use of Lévi-Straussian categories (eg Nature/Culture) have done so eclectically and without regard either to their specific relevance within a scientific problematic or to their general conceptual status. It is good, therefore, to be reminded, in a very lucid exposition, what the original application of these categories actually is, and also to have it suggested what alternative, and non-eclectic, application they might have.

This has further implications. For Eckert succeeds in demonstrating not only why the *auteur* structuralists, if that is what we are, are not very good structuralists in a Lévi-Straussian sense, but also why the objectives of film criticism and anthropological structuralist theory cannot in principle be the same. This last point is crucial. Its full import certainly escaped me at the time I wrote the earliest 'structuralist' text cited in the *Film Comment* article – the Introduction to my *Visconti* (1967) – and it may, I suspect, still escape the consciously articulated level of Eckert's own reasoning. But it is there, even if only symptomatically, and we should be grateful for the clarification its presence provides.

This said, we must now consider why a comparison between on the one hand Lévi-Strauss and on the other hand myself, Peter Wollen, Jim Kitses, Alan Lovell, old uncle Ben Brewster and all, should be relevant in the first place; and also why the names mentioned (which curiously exclude that of Paul Willemsen) should be seen as making a group. To the second part of the question a simple empirical answer can be given, which will serve as a starting point for further reflection. For texts by those authors in that order form the chronological sequence in which two publishing concerns (BFI/Secker and Warburg and SEFT/Screen) have brought out books or articles which make reference to structuralism. To a certain extent, also, these books and articles feed on each other. Wollen's *Signs and Meaning* quotes from and comments on the *Visconti* introduction; Kitses' *Horizons West* uses a similar defini-

94 tion of the *auteur* theory to that in *Visconti* and similar categories for the analysis of the Western to those in *Signs and Meaning*; Lovell's critique of Robin Wood and the subsequent debate also draw heavily on *Signs and Meaning*. The empirical connections, philologically established, are therefore quite real. But this is as far as it goes. The point here is that the history of diffusion of certain ideas is not necessarily the same as their origin, even within an empiricist/idealist framework. A 'history of ideas' account such as that offered by Eckert, which relies heavily on empirical accuracy, is always open to correction, much of it trivial, on the basis of further knowledge. In this particular case other texts, eg BFI Education Department seminar papers, could be brought in to show that the order of semi-public diffusion of the ideas was different from the one that emerges from a study of the published texts. Worse, the practice could be extended to cover all the private conversations through which ideas were passed from one person to another. From here one might proceed to the question of what books people had read, what individual cultural baggage and past ideological history each critic brought to the task of preparing a text, what the state of personal relations was between members of a group and so *ad infinitum*. All very boring, and Eckert doesn't do it, since he is in the fortunate position of living in Bloomington, Indiana and not in or around London W1.

The reason I labour this point is double. First to correct a possible empirical misconception which I happen to be able to correct because it concerns me. The textual origins (or 'generative locus') – (Eckert, p 47) of English *auteur* (or cine) structuralism may be in a book called *Visconti* which has my name on the title page. But if we are to be exact on an empirical-subjective level, then I would have to say for example that any debt the book may owe to Lévi-Strauss is the contribution of Rosalind Delmar and that any modifications it may make to the *auteur* theory as understood in England at the time were the fruit of a long-standing and also rather oblique intellectual relationship with Peter Wollen. Etcetera. But, and this is more important, the relationship between elements of a theory is not in fact a relationship of an empirical-subjective type at all. I think Eckert is aware of this, but he occasionally writes as if he wasn't, and thereby lays himself open to trivial and unworthy objections. The operative questions to ask about *auteur* structuralism (English-style) must indeed go behind, or beyond, the level of textual expression. But they do not after all lead us to the public bar of 'The Crown and Two Chairmen', or even to 'Les Deux Magots', but merely to a theoretical location, a sort of test track for ideological problematics, whose nature we must now proceed to specify.

The theoretical relations between the writings produced by some Anglo-local film critics associated with *Screen* and/or the Education Department on the one hand, and structuralism on the other,

are actually very different from Eckert's presentation of them. It should be pointed out here that most of the writings to which Eckert refers are decidedly sub-theoretical. They also relate, concretely, to different problematics from the one posited by Eckert as exemplary. Furthermore, a theory of the cinema, or a theory of ideological practices which includes 'cinema' as part of its object, is effectively non-existent. It is therefore very difficult to assess the texts collectively either as being themselves part of a theory or in the light of a theory of which they (as instances of ideology) would form the object. The task is only possible if one can EITHER specify certain elements in the texts as having in some way theoretical status, OR if one can specify a theory whose object is in the first place the cinema and in the second place cinema criticism and which is capable of illuminating the effective ideological relations between the texts in question.

Now this is a pretty heavy demand, and I am aware that readers of this piece (if there are any left, besides the compositor) are going to start asking what this theory/ideology business has to do with what looks like a fairly minor question of the history of film-critical ideas. But we have been forced onto this plane by the implicit claims put forward in the *Film Comment* article. For although the author finds a lot of what he reads in the English critics full of 'oversimplification, obtuseness and downright unfairness' (p 48), he does himself set up a theoretical standard and he does make demands on his material which ask of it more than just complexity, intelligence and fairness and which have, in fact, theoretical expectations. So the least we can do is return the compliment.

On the criteria which I am putting forward here a correct account of the relationship between the texts studied and 'structuralism' would not actually have to do the impossible. But it would have to provide, or in some way suggest that it could provide, some sort of hypothetical answers to the following questions: What might a structural/semiological theory of the cinema be? What sort of practice were the Anglo-local film critics engaged in, and what terms of what ideological problematic(s) do their work reflect? What is the concrete connection between their work and other work with theoretical aspirations?

The easiest place to start an analysis, I should have thought, is with ideology – in this case the ideology of *auteurism*. This is what Eckert appears to do, but he then gets side-tracked into the empirical game of summing up lateral connections and loses sight of the main trend. He gets back on track again when he observes (pp 47-48) 'The works of Nowell-Smith, Wollen and Kitses, all produced in the late sixties, might have represented a mere eddy in the current of *auteur* criticism had their methods and their cause not been taken up by other English critics.' Now this, it seems to me, is empirically inexact in a number of significant particulars. It

96 neglects the fact that *Signs and Meaning* is only *auteurist* for a third of its length. It proposes a continuity into the pages of *Screen* of the *auteurist* concerns of the *Visconti* introduction and the second chapter of *Signs and Meaning*, without also noting what else was happening in *Screen* at the time. And it refers to eddies in the 'current' of *auteur* criticism at the time when that particular stream was either drying up or becoming stagnant or whatever other metaphor may seem appropriate to indicate its impending terminus. But the statement is also correct. In these works of the late sixties *auteurism* is where it's at, and it is the contradictions of the *auteur* concept that we can find the key to what we are looking for.

Classic *auteur* criticism (old-style *Cahiers* etc) is aimed at vindicating the cinema as great art and the director/author as a great artist, but it tries to establish these claims on a basis which is not that of the simple transfer of literary critical canons into a new field. It says that the film director can be an author, but an author of a new type. Pace Alexandre Astruc, the camera is not a pen. The production set-up, particularly in Hollywood, and the fact of discontinuity between filmic discourse and verbal discourse about film, make it necessary to devise a new picture of the relationship of the author to his work. Despite the attempts of the rearguard (the self-styled *avant-garde*) to prove the contrary, it's not possible to commit one's thoughts to film on the analogy of committing one's thoughts to paper. It is not possible in literature either, or rather it is an epistemological confusion to think that this is an adequate description. But it is in film that the contradiction is most palpable. *Auteur* criticism never solved the question of the relationship between the text (movie) and the producing subject (author). It continued to ascribe to the author as subject whole sets of categories, concepts, relations, structures, ideological formations and God knows what, enough to blow to pieces any mind that had to contain them. At the same time it is clear, though it took *auteur* criticism to demonstrate the fact, that said concepts, categories etc are present in films and that this presence takes different forms in works with different authors. (It is also, I think, demonstrable that the absence of a real author tends seriously to dislocate the internal relations between the categories, concepts etc and to yield films which are often in a technical sense 'unreadable'.) The problem therefore was to find a materialist (or if you prefer objective) basis for the concept of authorship and to redefine the concept in such a way as to take account both of the specifics of film production, which seems at first sight to deny the concept of the author/artist entirely, and of the equally specific authorial presence in the movie text. Structural *auteurism*, or, as Eckert calls it, *auteur* structuralism, makes no sense except as an attempt to resolve this problem and to escape the Scylla and Charybdis of pro-*auteur* subjectivism and anti-*auteur* empiricism.

This brave materialist project was bound to have its limitations, and these limitations were bound to be exploited one way or the other. Inevitably bourgeois cretinism was going to raise its mangy head and starting gibbering about values and how you couldn't do without them. (Perhaps it is this aspect of humanist Don Quixote's tilting away at positivist windmills that Eckert finds marked by obtuseness and unfairness. He'd be right about the obtuseness.) More importantly, the identification of objective structures and of authorship as a possible structure in dominance (very inadequately theorised, at least as far as the *Visconti* was concerned) was only a part, though a vital and indeed central part, of the overall enterprise. A look at the three chapters of *Signs and Meaning* will confirm this. What has continued in the pages of *Screen*, once the debate about the presence or absence of values had fizzled out, has been the search for a theory and, in the case of certain writers such as Brewster, a materialist enquiry into the practices which would provide either the subject (in the strict Marxist sense) or the object of a theory. That progress has been halting is undeniable. It is equally undeniable that where progress has been made its 'generative locus' has been exogenous (or, to use a less Lévi-Straussian term, it has been, in plain English, French). New-style *Cahiers*, *Cinéthique* and Metz's *Essais* should be cited as the main sources, if sources there must be.

Now what particularly has to be stressed here is that the issue is one of content, not of 'method'. This is why in the search for exogenous sources it is quite irrelevant to have recourse to the name of Lévi-Strauss. For the only way in which Lévi-Strauss can be brought in is as the pioneer of a *method* of which the English cine-structuralists would be eclectic latterday adherents. What Eckert says, more or less, is 'Nowell-Smith, Kitses and Co have abused Lévi-Straussian method', to which charge Nowell-Smith at least is quite happy to plead guilty. But this is a bit like accusing someone of abusing a beer-can top by putting it in a parking meter, which, as Lévi-Strauss could tell us, is a harmless bit of *bricolage* and intellectually offensive only to misguided essentialists and teleologists. For the rest of us the charge is singularly lacking in menace, just as there is very little menace in the alternative charge (Eckert, p 46) that we have stripped the poor old *auteur* theory bare and then given it a new covering of structuralist gloss. For the operative question is whether the concepts employed in the revision of the *auteur* theory make sense in the place in which they are found, and, frankly, the more eclectic and even abusive the use of 'structuralist' concepts, the more likely they are to belong in their new location. The transfer of a 'method' from one object to another is a delicate business, but the delicacy does not consist in preserving the purity of the method but in testing its adequacy to the object and the validity of the transformations its application will produce. If any of us English

98 film critics had really had ambitions to turn our trade into a sub-branch of structural anthropology, then one or other of the charges might stick, but fortunately we did not.

This does not mean to say that texts like the *Visconti* were models of materialist film-critical practice. They were not, and the standpoint I would adopt now is necessarily as critical of some of my own work as it is of that of others. Having said why I think that Eckert's criticisms of the *Visconti* and of the other texts are the wrong ones, I should perhaps take the opportunity to offer my own criticism and self-criticism.

The *Visconti* book contains many of the same sources of error for which I criticise Charlie Eckert in this comment. For example, when discussing the 'so-called *auteur* theory', having quite rightly realised that it is not, in any rigorous sense, a theory, I then suggest it could better be regarded as a 'principle of method'. What this means I do not myself now know, but when I go on to propose that this principle of method could 'provide the basis for a more scientific form of criticism', the sleight of hand being practised becomes obvious. Maybe a principle of method can provide a basis for scientific activity, but the 'fact of authorship' can hardly be a principle of method in that sense. Also it is not quite clear how criticism can be 'scientific' without being underpinned by a science. If the *auteur* theory is not a theory, and it isn't, then theory had better emerge from somewhere else (eg a materialist semiology) because it is quite clear that 'criticism' is not going to do the job. In a nutshell, the whole formulation of the question given in the *Visconti* book is either sloppy or idealist or both.

Equally misguided is my approach to the concept of structure, which is sheerly essentialist. I argue that 'structures' are somehow opposed to 'facticity' and that if they are to exist they must somehow be timeless constants. This particular nonsense seems to derive from a failure to distinguish between abstract and concrete and between the types of relation necessary for there to be a structure and the actual set of relations which a particular structure embodies. I don't think it was my reading or misreading of Lévi-Strauss that misled me here so much as my submergence in a sub-culture of then fashionable historicist Marxism. The clean cool air of the theroreticist's Magic Mountain may not be the cure for all ills, but at least it gets you out of the smog.

Despite all these criticisms I would still maintain, as I have done throughout, that the texts written in the 'late sixties' (oh, so long ago), of which the *Visconti* is an example, represent not only an advance but an advance towards materialism, which is the only theoretical principle capable of making sense of *ideas*. For this reason I have not hesitated, in the course of this piece, to 'read' what was written then in the light of subsequent progress. I cannot reproach Charlie Eckert for his criticisms, and I am

certainly not opposed to the positive side of what he is doing in prospecting the application of the structural analysis of myth to areas of the cinema such as Science Fiction. The disappointing thing, to me, is that the criticisms he makes remain variants of the same problematic in which the texts being criticised were imprisoned. 99

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Edward Buscombe

Cukor has always presented a problem to film criticism. To those critics for whom the highest virtue of a director is self-effacement Cukor appears to be one of the greatest. Never the author of his own material, he faithfully and tastefully transposes to the screen the works of others. Though the films are clearly of a high quality, and this quality is in some sense attributable to the director, yet Cukor himself is strangely invisible behind them; and here lies the critical problem in this instance. Cukor is a great director, but there is, literally, nothing to say about him.

*Auteur* criticism has found him equally hard to handle. Sarris, in *The American Cinema*, is reduced to this: 'When a director has provided tasteful entertainments of a high order consistently over a period of more than thirty years, it is clear that said director is much more than a mere entertainer.' In other words, it can't be mere coincidence that Cukor's name appears on the credits of all these films. But Sarris is singularly unconvincing in attempting to define what Cukor's excellence consists of. *Auteur* criticism, committed as it is to the director whose personality shines through, is helpless in the face of a director who deliberately eschews the expression of his own ideas. Significantly, *Movie*, which rated Cukor only below Hawks and Hitchcock in its 'talent histogram' (issue no 1) found virtually nothing to say about him beyond some remarks on the censoring of *The Chapman Report*.

The application of a more deliberately structuralist *auteur* criticism to a director such as Cukor does hold out the hope of something more positive. Sarris, to be fair, does manage to identify a 'theme' in his work: 'The director's theme is imagination, with the focus on the imaginer rather than on the thing imagined.' Sarris notices, as others had done before him, that many of Cukor's films are about the theatre or about actors. More than this he cannot say, and perhaps one should not expect it within the short space he (conveniently?) allows himself.

At least Sarris attempts some sort of analysis. Gary Carey, in his book *Cukor & Co* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1971) simply refuses the responsibility of defining his subject at all:

... some critics have attempted to prove that Cukor's major theme has been theater versus reality, and by pushing and pulling a little, they have extended this to mean illusion versus reality. If this were true, then Cukor's best films should be *A Double Life* and *Les*

\* *On Cukor*, by Gavin Lambert, W. H. Allen, 1973 (276 pp; £3.00).

102 *Girls*, which deal directly with this theme. Unfortunately, they are only fair-to-middling. The most one can conclude about Cukor's predilection for backstage stories is that he, like most theater people, relishes shoptalk (p 9).

(If Mr Carey's conclusion were true, then most Hollywood people would be making films about Hollywood.) The crude dismissal of attempts to establish patterns within Cukor's work employs a familiar tactic; it confuses Cukor's theme (theatre) with the relative degree of artistic success Cukor achieves in each film. Clearly, these are quite different things, and in no sense dependent on each other. It is quite possible that Cukor should exhibit in all his films except one a concern with things theatrical, and for this one exception to be his aesthetically most satisfying film. This might constitute a problem for critics, but it would not disprove that Cukor's films exhibited a thematic consistency. The confusion that Carey produces here has, of course, a project; having ridiculed the very idea of trying to establish a pattern in Cukor's films, he hopes to leave the way clear for his own type of critical account. This consists in handing out off-the-cuff judgements on individual films (the title of the book, *Cukor & Co* is, of course, not innocent: '... Cukor's personality in film is subservient to that of his writers and actors, and his sensibility can best be grasped from the type of collaborators with whom he worked most felicitously.' In other words, while making use of an *auteur*-type classification, Carey doesn't believe it has much validity.) Yet Carey's procedure of handling each film separately does not constitute a fully thought-out attack on the *auteur* theory; it merely serves as a means of erecting the critic into an 'authority'. Carey proceeds to pronounce upon each of Cukor's films in turn, in terms of its aesthetic success or lack of it. Strangely, most of Cukor's achievements are rated very low, so low that one wonders why Carey should have bothered to write about Cukor at all; he doesn't, for example, much like *David Copperfield*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Philadelphia Story*, *The Women*, *Two-faced Woman*, *Adam's Rib*, *Born Yesterday* or *Heller In Pink Tights*, and one really does wonder how someone who doesn't much care for these films can like Cukor at all. But what one chiefly notices is this: that Carey, just like so many Cukor critics, is totally unable to *explain* his likes and dislikes. Of *The Philadelphia Story* he remarks lamely that Cukor's direction is 'highly polished' (the last ditch defence of all Cukor admirers!). Such terms as 'polished', 'stylish', 'tasteful' occur with great regularity in writing about Cukor, and are, usually, proposed to fill the gap left by the denial of any thematic consistency to Cukor's work. So, Cukor isn't a director whose films are always about the same thing, yet on the other hand he does make good films. The films must therefore have qualities which can only be described in terms of style, hence 'stylish', etc, etc.

Unfortunately, the Anglo-American critical tradition is not equipped to cope with such a director. Imprisoned as it is within a method which was constructed to deal with the moral and social implications of a work of art, it is literally speechless before a film which appears to demand an analysis of its style. Such criticism can only genuflect in the direction of what it dimly perceives to be 'stylish'. Cukor's films are, in effect, declared to be unanalysable. The almost total lack of serious treatment of Cukor's films in English testifies to this.

Anglo-American criticism then is doubly incompetent to deal with Cukor. It has not developed the equipment to analyse Cukor as a 'stylist', while its crass philistinism denies that the work has the distinction of having thematic consistency, except insofar as a Sarris gives a nod in that direction. But, as was said above, a more rigorously structural approach does offer some way out of the impasse. It is possible to provide some account of Cukor's work which justifies treating his work as more than a number of films which just *happen* to have the same name appearing immediately before the action begins.

There is no space to do more than indicate what such a description of Cukor's work might be like. But it would do more than merely observe that many of Cukor's films are about show business. Those films which do take either Broadway or Hollywood as their subject have as their dynamic an opposition between the private personality of the central character and the demands imposed upon him or her by the world they inhabit. Show business requires that the hero or heroine sacrifice personal happiness to their careers; or, alternatively, that their personalities are destroyed by forces stronger than themselves – the central characters are not always given the awareness that would allow them to choose. Films that would correspond to this schemata would include (archetypally) *A Star Is Born*, but also *What Price Hollywood*, *A Double Life*, *It Should Happen To You* (publicity taking the place of show business proper), *Les Girls*, *Heller In Pink Tights* and *Let's Make Love*. The important thing about Cukor's work considered as a whole however, is that though the majority of his films are not actually about show business they nevertheless reveal the same pattern. The same conflict as exists in the show business films can be located in the others, except that it has undergone a process of transformation. In *Adam's Rib*, for example, show business is replaced by the law, but the kind of opposition set up between the central characters and the demands of the world in which they work is very similar to that in *A Star Is Born*. In each case the wife's success in her career breaks up the marriage. Even if the parallels were not already clear, *Adam's Rib* is full of analogies between the legal business and show business. Adam Bonner refers to the defendant's 'performance, complete with make-up and costume' and he calls the trial 'a circus'. (See p 93 of the script of *Adam's Rib*, pub-

Virtually all Cukor's central characters are essentially performers, called upon to play a role which threatens to split their personality in two, a public and a private half. It is this fact which unites such apparently disparate films as *A Woman's Face*, *Born Yesterday*, *Bhowani Junction* and *My Fair Lady*. In each of these films the female character at the centre of the picture finds it increasingly hard to conform to the role which she is expected to play by the men who attempt to control her life, her public performance, and so she is driven eventually to make a break, to reject the part which has been written for her and to become, as it were, the author of her own life.

Clearly the transformations of this basic situation which take place in some of the films are extremely complex, and in some cases, such as *The Women*, displaced from the centre of the film. But I offer these suggestions for a possible structural analysis of Cukor not in the form of a fully worked-out scheme but merely in order to show that such an analysis *might* be possible. What is disturbing about Gavin Lambert's book is that such a possibility is dismissed, almost contemptuously, right from the start. Lambert pronounces: 'I don't think the [*auteur*] theory means anything at all, really. . . . Doesn't the whole theory break down under any sort of practical scrutiny?' (pp 13-14). Cukor denies that he is an *auteur* because, he says, he doesn't believe in it) the theory might allow for an *auteur* who made films from other people's scripts. And in this sense Cukor's claim to be an *auteur* would rest on having a 'personal style and personal imagination' (p 13). So the possibility that Cukor might be a true *auteur* instead of a *metteur en scène* (to use the old *Cahiers* distinction) is rejected out of hand, and we are left with the familiar treatment of Cukor in terms of something called 'style', which, once again, is never really defined.

Lambert's book, then, is hamstrung before it gets under way by its decision, not argued out, to deal with Cukor as a stylist. He concerns himself only with the 'form' of the film, not its 'content', and in fact there is scarcely any analysis in the book of the 'signifiers' of the form (the structure of sounds and images which the film is composed of). The book is mostly about the emotions and ideas of the characters.\* Lambert doesn't succeed very well in describing how Cukor uses the camera, or sound. On p 187 he introduces the subject of the camera, but his actual remarks about Cukor's use of it are extremely lame: 'Different cameramen photographed *David Copperfield* and *Camille* and *Gaslight*, but what one sees in all three is *your* style rather than a particular cameraman's style.' This is all; and when Cukor seems

\* I use the words 'the emotions and ideas of the characters' in the sense that Metz uses them in 'Methodological Propositions for the Analysis of Film', reprinted in *Screen*, v 14, n 1/2, p 90.

inclined to agree with him, the point is not pressed; not only can he not define this 'style' himself; he doesn't attempt to get Cukor himself to define it. 105

Even within the limits which Lambert has set himself, then, the book is disappointing. This is not to deny that there are some extremely interesting things in it, mostly in the form of sudden revealing statements by Cukor on his own practice. For example:

And yet my work really begins and ends through the actors. And it seems to me, the more successfully you work through the actors, the more your own work disappears (p 188).

I believe in the detached approach for comedy. If you *really look* at anything, there's always a comic note. A painful note, too. One brings the other to life (p 152).

It was human. Comedy isn't really any good, isn't really funny, without that. First you've got to be funny, and then to elevate the comedy you've got to be human. That's why anything that works as comedy should also work as tragedy, and vice versa (p 201).

But Lambert, having elicited such *aperçues*, is content to leave things at that. His general tone is too civilised and urbane really to probe very deep, too well-bred to take seriously any 'ideas' (viz his treatment of the *auteur* theory). In *Screen* v 13 n 2 he was asked, 'How important do you think theory is from a film maker's point of view? Do you feel a victim of this English prejudice [against theory] yourself? Lambert's reply is instructive: 'If it works for you, fine. It doesn't particularly happen to work for me. I can't imagine that anything I would do creatively would be very much influenced by a theory!' (p 56). It's not that he has anything against ideas as such; it's just that he doesn't have much use for them, either in his film making or, it appears here, his critical writing. Despite Lambert's criticisms of *Sight and Sound* in the *Screen* interview, he seems to share their suspicions of any attempt at systematic thinking about the cinema. It's true he has done his research and knows the films very well; but the book seems in the end a wasted opportunity. It doesn't seem at all concerned to pursue, for example, the kind of research which would really have been interesting, such as on the precise nature of Cukor's relations with his collaborators. Cukor is allowed to get away with saying surprisingly little about his work with the Kanins, despite the fact that some of his best films were made from their scripts. (Garson Kanin, in his book *Tracy and Hepburn*, London 1972, doesn't find much to say about Cukor either, despite the fact that the latter directed all their scripts for the famous pair. There seems to be a mystery here somewhere . . .)

Yet even if Lambert had accepted the possibility that Cukor's work exhibits a pattern in its content, this would hardly in itself

106 prevent it from being, what it undoubtedly is, curiously old-fashioned. For in any case while apparently dismissing the *auteur* theory he in practice subscribes to it, in his assumption that Cukor's films do in themselves form a complete entity, a body of work to be cordoned off from cinema, examined as a thing in itself. In fact, of course, it is impossible to see Cukor in this way. There are simply too many questions which cannot be answered if we do. That part of a film, whether content or form, which we designate 'Cukor' exists combined with all sorts of other things, other codes. In conclusion, a few of these may be cited, simply to show that to posit Cukor as the 'inventor' of his films is just as much an error as to refuse to look for any structure in the narrative of those films made under his name:

1. Lambert refers to the documentary look of Cukor's films around the late forties and early fifties, as though Cukor invented this. Has he forgotten all the other documentary-style films made at that time? (eg *Call Northside 777*, *Panic in the Streets*, *The Naked City*, etc).
2. The relationship between Tracy and Hepburn which exists in Cukor's films (basically a battle of wits) is almost exactly reproduced in Capra's *State of the Union* – not scripted by the Kanins.
3. Lambert rightly picks out long takes as a feature of Cukor's style. But equally long takes exist in Capra films, and others.
4. Despite Lambert's opinion that Cukor's style obliterates that of his cameramen, there is clearly every difference in the world between the high gloss of *The Women* and the much rougher, grainier look of the late forties films. The difference needs to be explained in terms both of technological factors and decisions made by Cukor and his cameraman about relating style to content. And, of course, over and beyond that there is the question of *why* Cukor should think a glossy look appropriate to *The Women*; what Metz would call a 'signification of extra-cinematic origins' would be required to be defined to explain this.

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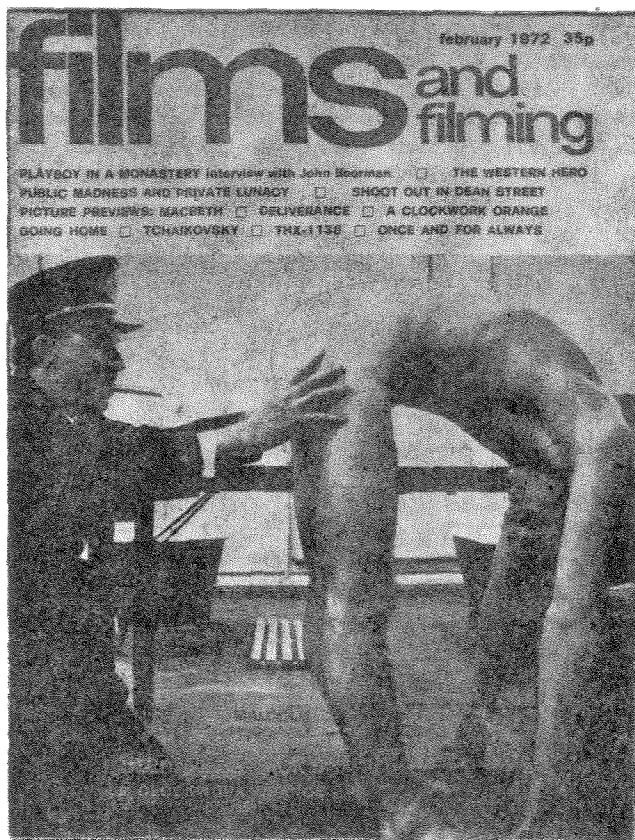
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Jim Hillier

This book by Collet (previously the author of the 1963 Seghès book on Godard), is a collection of essays and articles, mostly from the French review *Etudes*, written by Collet in the period 1963-1971, with the emphasis on the later years. The essays cover the film-makers Jacques Rozier, Claude Chabrol, François Truffaut, Jacques Rivette, Jacques Demy, and Eric Rohmer, that is to say the (on the whole) less written about figures of the *nouvelle vague* and their films, in which Collet has sought the 'significant structures'.

On one level, the essays represent some exceptionally intelligent and perceptive criticism of the films and the ideas of the film-makers concerned. Indeed, it would be difficult to find more intelligent discussions of the work of Rohmer, Demy and Truffaut, and perhaps of all the figures. Collet is particularly adept and illuminating in the way he refers back to the *Cahiers* criticism of Rohmer, Rivette and Truffaut and relates it to their film-making practice. On another level, Collet has a very particular interest in these film-makers, and in the *nouvelle vague* as a whole, relating clearly to the fact that most of them emerged from criticism:

Finally what interests me in the *auteurs* of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* generation is that their films become interrogation on spectacle itself, exploration of the roles of fiction and the spectator. Such would be the common ground between works as different as those of Chabrol and Rohmer, for example. This reflection on spectacle undertaken by Renoir, and become banal since Godard, seems to me far from exhausted. Hardly suggested in these day to day critical essays, it opens a question which must be taken up: why is the cinema becoming the privileged subject of the cinema?

Despite the variety of ways in which the concepts of reflection and interrogation are employed by Collet – sometimes they seem used only in the vaguest sense that 'all art is at some level about other art' – Collet's preoccupation with them link him clearly with modernist cinema and criticism. There is, however, a certain challenge to the way the concepts are normally used in Collet's inclusion in his considerations of film-makers like Truffaut and Chabrol, whose work has sometimes been considered (usually in contrast to Godard) as the new *cinema de papa*, and Rohmer, discussion of whom has often centred on his 'transparency' and whose aesthetics have been roundly attacked by the new guard

\* *Le Cinema en Question*, Jean Collet, Collection 7e Art, Editions du cerf, Paris 1973.

110 of *Cahiers* (in which Rohmer was once, of course, the prime force).

On a third – and most important – level, related to the second, Collet's book encapsulates and explores the problematic situation of criticism at this juncture in time. Although he often disagrees with them, Collet clearly admires the new generation of *Cahiers* critics – 'the most committed criticism of the present time (and it happens that it is also the most competent)' – and believes that 'criticism . . . has progressed in the last five years in giant steps. Reading films is beginning to become a science, with its laws. And if the cinema is, as a whole, stagnating, paradoxically we are seeing a decisive stage in its analysis'. The development of criticism is very discernable in Collet's essays, the more recent of which are immersed in notions of bourgeois aesthetics, structure, sign, reading and text, making reference to figures such as Barthes and Lévi-Strauss (see, for example, the short 1971 essay on Demy's *Peau d'Ane*). In the introduction to the book, Collet makes his auto-critique of his own criticism, noting 'their empiricism, their imprecise formulation, the musty smell of moralism still left in the vocabulary'. He remarks, for example, how suspect his use of the word 'mystery', in his discussion of Rivette, has become in times when materialism is obligatory. Nevertheless, very little of Collet's criticism is as deformed by empiricism, imprecision and moralism as most other critical writing and on the whole Collet has tried to maintain his critical method:

In my eyes every film is a living structure. Criticism must give an account of its particular form. This form generates meaning, which must not be confused with the author's intentions, nor with his message or some 'world vision'. The exploration of a latent content has always guided my approach.

By a curious coincidence, the relationship between 'scientific' criticism and Collet's empiricism is made very clear by juxtaposing Collet's brief essay on Rozier's *Adieu Philippine* with Metz's syntagmatic analysis of the film. When Metz, writing in 1967, summarises his analysis with 'it appears in resumé that the frequencies, rarities and absences established in *Adieu Philippine* allow us to confirm and make precise what critical intuition indicates about the style of this film', the critical intuition he has in mind is very probably Collet's, whose 1963 essay introduces the script of the film and locates in it precisely what Metz sought to confirm:

*Adieu Philippine* is a film to decode between the shots. For supposed cinematographic grammar undergoes here the same fate as its worthy sister of the Académie. *Adieu Philippine* is not made up of a series of shots articulated to tell the story of something. *Adieu Philippine* is a certain number of moments caught live, of autonomous moments. Basically, a documentary on cinematographic language.

These observations of Collet's indicate preoccupations much more likely to develop in French criticism than in English, very much in line with much writing in earlier *Cahiers*. These could be summarised as a general theoretical thrust, which made it much more likely that progress in critical theory would emerge in French film culture. Collet however has remained a practising critic rather than a theoretician and the central interest of his essays here is precisely the way in which he has felt impelled in his criticism to take cognizance of theoretical debate, particularly in the area of ideology and aesthetics. Thus, in contrast to that vast body of criticism which is fast becoming if not unreadable at least highly unsatisfactory, Collet's essays give some indication of (though in no sense a model for) what criticism which does take account of theoretical advance might achieve.

His writing on Chabrol, for example, takes a line radically different from that of Wood and Walker in their 1970 book on Chabrol. Collet focusses his interest in Chabrol's relationship to the 'bourgeois aesthetic' rather than in Chabrol's 'message', 'vision of the world' or characters and relationships. Though he shares some of Wood and Walker's conclusions about Chabrol, by locating fascination and inversion as key structural components of Chabrol's cinema, he is able to conclude that 'it is not to denounce monsters that he makes films but rather to study the very mechanism of this denunciation-fascination':

the bourgeois aesthetic . . . depends upon a precise delimitation of being and appearing. It rests upon a code of rigorous censorship. . . . It leads straight to litotes, which is also called *trompe-oeil* and finally hypocrisy. It is an ethic of representation. But even more, it has promoted representation as an ethic for existence. It is a way of living in representation, a philosophy of life as pure spectacle. In the extreme, it confuses value with what can be seen (and therefore sold: the value of exchange . . . ). In contrast, everything which escapes observation, everything which does not disturb our conscience is without value. . . . We have access to the world today only by the mediation of a *spectacle*. . . . In this sense, all films which use spectacle to reverse its play and invite us to reflect upon this mechanism are of urgent usefulness. Chabrol's genius is in giving the illusion that he is making entertainment films, that he is an uncommitted artist, a manufacturer of spectacles. While by making of this entertainment the very object of his procedure, he poses the most disturbing and most radically subversive interrogation to our civilisation.

In Collet's schematic view of what has become of the old *Cahiers* critics, he puts Godard and Rivette 'on the side of reflection' and Chabrol and Rohmer 'on the side of reality', with Truffaut in between. Collet's notion of interrogation is sometimes imprecise, but it seems that he relates Chabrol, for example, to a

112 questioning of narrative conventions rather than to Godard's interrogation of syntactical conventions, though both sides must relate also to the wider issue of representation. Collet's biggest problem in the essays is in relating Truffaut to any kind of questioning. At one point, it seems little more than 'Trauffaut progresses by successive contradictions' (thus *La Peau Douce* is the anti-*Jules et Jim*'), the issue being posed more or less in terms of making something difficult (a complicated flashback structure, for example) work, with Collet concluding with the doubtful (and probably increasingly indefensible) claim that 'the question "how" is the artist's affair, the question "why" the critic's'. Nevertheless, the essays on Truffaut are further evidence of Collet's appreciation of the general debate, since he feels obliged to *defend* Truffaut's cinema and Truffaut's desire to submit to narrative structures, to be above all 'a modern storyteller'. It is a pity that here, as elsewhere, the cinema to which Collet opposes Truffaut's 'submission to the story and its rules' is more often that of Cournot and Lelouch – easy targets – than that of Godard and Rivette. In discussing Rivette, Collet notes that:

in recognising that there is only one film subject, the theatre, Rivette invites us to a capital discovery: the cinema is always a play between lying and truth, between artifice and transparency. But if transparency can be given as a state of grace, it is more often the fruit of long work. It is by the accumulation of all its 'lies', all its artifices, that the cinema sometimes restores to us the truth of things.

It is in this perspective that Collet writes about Rohmer, whom he sees quite rightly as at the centre of the debate about realism and ideology.

Rohmer's *oeuvre* is today the locus of an impassioned debate . . . on one side there are those who film the cinema, who denounce its always renascent mirages, who force the spectator to recognise himself as spectator, voyeur, consumer. Briefly, to use the fashionable jargon, who delineate by 'deconstructing' films. Opposed to them . . . those who seek to make their act transparent, to make us forget that they are filming to let us watch what they see. . . . Today this aesthetic choice can also be analysed in political terms: to expose the cinema is to be on the Left. To tend to transparency is to be on the side of the illusionists, is to be reactionary. . . . For a materialist, 'transparency' is always illusory. The cinema cannot express the 'real', only our ideas about the real. The cinema which wishes to represent reality would therefore be, necessarily, the cinema of a hidden ideology.

In this debate, Rohmer has been seen, almost exclusively, as for transparency, thus reactionary, notably by the new *Cahiers* critics (although their opposition is more to Rohmer's ideas than his

works). Despite his admiration for them, Collet takes issue with the *Cahiers* writers and the perspective he provides is both a very fruitful analysis of Rohmer's cinema and a useful widening and questioning of the representation issue. Collet distinguishes between naturalism (the *vraisemblable*) in the classical tradition of narrative cinema and Rohmer's procedures: 'one is not transparent. One decides to become so'. The structural poles of Rohmer's cinema are discerned as word and image, establishing the distance between conscience (word/commentary) and act (image). Through Rohmer's themes of choice and chance, Collet identifies Rohmer's characters' *resistance* – to seduction, temptation etc but also fundamentally to reality: 113

this resistance of the characters of the solicitations of the real, how can one not see that it expresses the fundamental problem of every film-maker. . . . It is the resistance of the film-maker to events which leads him to the real. This dialectic of creation – resistance, transparency – has become the subject of the film (*Ma Nuit chez Maud*). And its power of provocation, at least equal to the films of Godard and Straub, values that permanent mastery of events, that construction of the story, of *mise en scène* which conjugate their arbitrary elements in order to efface themselves imperceptibly to the benefit of things . . . (Rohmer) gives us an extraordinary lesson in freedom. A freedom which frightens us because it calls upon us irresistibly to choose in our turn, therefore to be free. On the most closed world, Rohmer poses the most open gaze.

Collet's discussion takes us already quite far from the usual notions of transparency. His analysis of *Le Genou de Claire* is particularly convincing:

What do we see beside the lake at Annecy? A novelist. What is she doing in the soft July light? She is weaving a *plot*. She tries on (as one says one tries on clothes) situations. . . . How can one not be struck by the contrast between the thinness of the action and the prolific reflection it engenders. . . . The real drama, the real action of the film, is the conflict between a thought and a world. *Le Genou de Claire* like *La Collectionneuse* and the other *contes moraux* is not a complacent contemplation of the splendour of things . . . *Le Genou de Claire* offers itself as a tale, a story, a word. And this word comes up against the world . . . Rohmer realised Godard's dream: to film a thought in motion . . . Rohmer can dispense with putting into his film, like many modern film-makers, the signs of his work, the stigma of the cinema. One would have to be blind not to recognise this time in the experience of Aurora-the-novelist the experience of cinematographic realisation. For finally what is a film if not this confrontation between a dream

114 and a substance which resists it, this testing out of a plot, an idea, a fiction?

Collet's book is interesting and important not so much for what it tells us about Chabrol and Rohmer and the others – though what it tells us about them is of very considerable interest – as for its attempt to operate in the present situation of criticism, to work with the notions constituting the centre of the critical debate without being fearful of them or terrorised by them.

## Terry Lovell

The more successful sciences have always been the source of models and paradigms for others, and each new 'scientific revolution' – physics, chemistry, biology – has stimulated a host of hopeful imitations and analogous models in the cultural sciences. The spectacular success of its 20th century revolution has made linguistics an obvious paradigmatic successor, and on the face of it, a more promising one, since all the phenomena of the cultural world are deeply implicated with language. Predictably, then, linguistics has given birth to 'semiology' – the putative general science of signs, 'structuralism' – the attempt to apply the models, methods and concepts drawn largely from linguistics, to broader fields (anthropology, sociology, literature, film, popular culture, etc).

As was pointed out in the *Screen* (v 14 n 1/2) double issue on cinema semiotics, most of the major contributors to French structuralism have been available in translation for some time now. But despite the existence of enthusiastic bands of *cognoscenti* in most British universities, structuralism and semiology have not been taken up on any considerable scale in this country, and are viewed with deep suspicion by the intellectual establishment. This is sometimes explained in terms of traditional British philistinism in the face of abstract theory, especially in its French variants. British empiricism is, it is true, deep-rooted, and a 'show us the goods' attitude is typical of the response to structuralist interventions in, for example, film and literature. However, this stock response to a stock response (the charge of philistinism against empiricist scepticism), can be used as a cover for empty pretentiousness; each case must therefore be judged on its merits, and it has to be said that semiology has been rather scanty in its achievements, if, for example, what we are searching for is a method of analysing films and novels, Metz's single contribution is his analysis of *Adieu Phillipine*,<sup>1</sup> and other writers have added little in the way of substantial analyses. In the case of the novel, one thinks of Todorov's analysis of Henry James tales.<sup>2</sup> Too often, however the analyses either re-translate interpretations which are already available to us into a new terminology, or, where they offer us new interpretations, as is the case with Barthes on contemporary myth<sup>3</sup>, it is difficult to see what the analysis owes to semiological theory and methods, rather than to intuition commonly found in quite orthodox methods. However, before we go on to endorse the 'show us the goods' attitude, we should perhaps pause and consider whether we are asking for the right goods.

\* *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, journal of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham. This article refers in particular to issue no 3, Autumn 1972.



116 The intellectual imperialism of the structuralist prophets has not helped. There is a tendency to make large claims, so that it is seen as capable of solving *all* problems connected with the cultural sciences.

A more cautious approach to structuralism is to be found in Jonathan Culler.<sup>4</sup> He re-emphasises an important distinction of Barthes' between the task of assigning meaning to items of culture or behaviour, and that of studying the *conditions* of meaning. The latter is an attempt to reconstruct the general rules, conventions, implicit knowledge, which allow us to read these meanings in culture and behaviour. This is the proper domain of semiology, and it takes the meaning, or at least a limited range of acceptable interpretations, as the *given* point of departure. It is no part of the semiological enterprise to assign meanings, nor to adjudicate disputes, and it is the hope or expectation that semiology would provide an authoritative method of reading meaningful structures that is behind the disappointment of the sceptic response. We have only to consider for a moment the paradigm case, that of structural linguistics, to see that this expectation was mistaken. The linguist takes as his point of departure the stock of well-formulated formulae of the language, and it is because the language speaker can recognise these, because there is consensus (leaving aside a few borderline cases) on whether or not a given formulation is meaningful and well-formed, that the linguist can proceed to construct 'competence models' which he attributes to the speaker (though not to his consciousness) and which explain or 'generate' competent linguistic performance. If we could not recognise independently whether or not a performance was competent, this whole method would collapse.

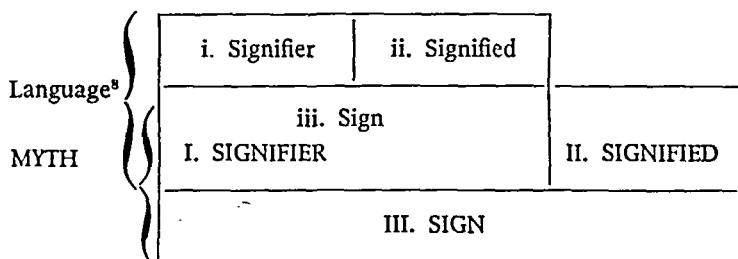
Similarly poetics (the science of literature) takes as *given*, says Culler, 'a range of interpretations which seem acceptable to skilled readers' (p 33) and investigates the rules, conventions, structures, which constrain such readings. Here we encounter the first difficulty which confronts a film semiology, which is the shortage of 'skilled readings' due to the poverty of practical film criticism. The problem is present in the case of literature but acute in relation to popular culture. Culler's resolution of the problem for literature is simple. We rely on consensual validation; on the Leavisite 'this is so, is it not?' at the end of each reading.

Statistical surveys of people's immediate interpretations are irrelevant. What is crucial is their coming to accept the plausibility of a *skilled* reading once it has been made to them, just as the psychoanalyst depends on the patient coming to accept the analyst's account as correct. Where a degree of such consensus is available, the semiologist is in business. Where it is not, he cannot fill the breach himself. In other words, the semiologist depends for his activity either upon a well-developed tradition of practical criticism, or upon a popular consensus that *of course* this is what

x means – the taken-for-granted meaningfulness of everyday life which may be available for the analyst of some kinds of popular culture. For example, the perception of the picturesque which Barthes's analyses when he points out that mountains, streams, gorges are included in the picturesque in the iconography of travel guides, while plains are not. Barthes here can draw on the general consensus that mountains, gorges etc simply *are* picturesque, and use that perception as his point of departure. If there was widespread disagreement on this definition of the picturesque, he could hardly go on to explain how those meanings were generated. Where meanings are themselves opaque, and when the 'this is so, is it not?' of analysis meets no answering assent, then semiology has no place to start.

The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham has been engaged in the study and analysis of popular culture for almost a decade, and in its journal *Cultural Studies*, has recently turned to semiological theory and methods, to look at such phenomena as TV<sup>6</sup>, news-photographs,<sup>7</sup> etc. A wide assortment of materials is covered, but a single dominant interest underlies the enterprise. In the tradition of Barthes' *Mythologies*, it attempts to uncover the ideological messages of popular culture. Now the ideology of popular culture is precisely an area in which no interpretive consensus is readily available on the one hand, and on the other, there is no established 'authority' whose 'readings' can be taken as 'skilled'. Consequently any foray into this field has perforce to try to do two jobs: to establish 'skilled readings' and persuade readers that they are indeed skilled, *and* to establish a 'poetics' of popular culture. The two enterprises stand or fall together. Where the readings persuade, the explanations are plausible. Where they do not, the 'structures' which 'explain' that reading also leave us cold.

Barthes and Co are the seminal influences on the work of the Centre. Barthes defines ideology in terms of myth, myth being a fragment of ideology, and ideology the total configuration of myths of a given culture. Myth is identified as a second-order language, in which the signifier plus signified of the first order become in turn the signifiers of a second order signification (see diagram below).



Myth is the elaboration of second-order meanings onto an already meaningful sign. He gives two examples: the first is the use of a phrase from a fable by Aesop or Phaedrus, 'my name is Lion' as an exemplar in a latin grammar; the second, that of the image on the front cover of *Paris-Match* of a negro soldier saluting the French flag. In each case, an already meaningful item is placed in a context in which some of its attributes are generalised so that it becomes *exemplary*, standing for those attributes. In thus becoming exemplary or typical, it loses much of the richness and articulability of its first order meanings. Barthes calls it a process of 'language-robbery'.

Barthes' account of myth as a level of signification exactly parallels his concept of connotation, and Hall and Camargo<sup>9</sup> make a great deal of this distinction between connotation and denotation. Myth and ideology belong to the level of connotation. Hall refers this distinction to J S Mill's account: 'A connotative term is one which denotes a subject and applies an attribute.' 'The word *white* denotes all white things, as snow, paper, foam of the sea, etc or . . . *connotes* the attribute *whiteness*. . .'<sup>10</sup>

This attempt to identify myth, and ultimately ideology with one level of signification is, I believe, based upon a fallacy which can be seen at work in Barthes. This is the notion of a pre-mythological, neutral signification of objects; an innocent state which Barthes is at once trying to recover, while at the same recognising the futility of the attempt. For such a state lies beyond signification altogether, with the thing-in-itself. We find in Barthes a constant yearning for the thing-in-itself, and for concepts expressed only in action (he gives the example of the concept of 'tree' contained in the woodcutter's action of chopping it down); for the innocent state of things before they have been betrayed by the sign. Hence his attachment to a 'zero degree'<sup>11</sup> of writing, and to contemporary poetry's dispersal of meaning, its 'regressive semiology' . . . and in his later 'S/Z', to an ideal, empty 'scriptible' text which the reader in effect, writes himself, as against the more orthodox 'lisible' text which is merely 'readable', although its possible readings may be plural. In all of these he sees attempts to avoid the tyranny of connotation, each equally unable in the last resort to escape, because the only escape is in silence. The concept of denotation as used by Barthes and in turn by Hall perpetuates the myth of a neutral language. It seems to me less dangerous to recognise that ideological meanings are located at *all* levels of signification. For denotation avoids the possibility of abstraction only when it limits itself to naming objects. And we should remember Bertrand Russell's assertion in the context of another search for a neutral language, that of logical atomism, that the only 'logically proper names' are 'this' and 'that'. Such a level of denotation is little better than silence. Once we name our object *under some description* (eg 'white'), then in so denoting that we

point to the qualities and properties which they have and which they may exemplify. Denotation and connotation are merely opposite sides of the same coin. In so far as ideological motivations are implicated in a connotative definition, so are they in the corresponding denotation. The abstract concepts of ideology and of theory all imply certain denotative descriptions, and all denotations are 'theory-laden', or 'ideology-laden'. There are no neutral descriptions at any level of signification.<sup>12</sup>

The distinction between denotation and connotation therefore does not help us to identify ideology, nor to say what the ideological or mythological significance on any given item is, for ideology is not an extra accretion of meaning overlaid on some non- or pre-ideological base.

Ideology seeps down to every level of signification, and is of course implicated in social practices themselves. The attempt to differentiate ideology in terms of levels of signification is therefore mistaken. However, we may wish to retain a distinction between the ideological and the non-ideological, even if we do not locate it in the distinction between connotation and denotation. Traditionally, ideology is contrasted either with science or theory. Or we may wish to adopt a pan-ideological stance which finds that *all* significant structures are located within an ideological field. If we adopt the latter posture, however, we merely displace the necessity for distinctions to within the field of ideology itself. If everything is ideological, not everything is ideological in the same way or to the same degree. We need to distinguish between ideology as it is embedded in the significations of 'everyday life', and in say, Marxist or sociological theories.

If we maintain a distinction between theory – or science – and ideology, then the differences manifestly do not lie in different levels of signification, for both denotation and connotation will be found within both science *and* ideology.

As we have seen, there are two tasks to be performed in relation to the abstraction of ideological significance from popular culture. Firstly, to lay bare the ideological meanings of apparently non-ideological or 'natural' meanings of items of popular culture, and secondly to create models of the structuring of ideology – the conventions, rules etc which generate those meanings. We have seen that the second task is not viable without considerable progress in the first, and that precisely because of lack of progress in the first task, due to a lack both of authoritative readings and of general consensus, the second is restricted. The journal of *Cultural Studies*, as Barthes himself, is forced to do both at the same time, and more seriously, they try to do both jobs with the tools of semiological analysis. In relation to the task of constructing ideological meanings they find themselves in a dilemma. Where we can agree on the ideological interpretation offered, the analysis seems compelling, but precisely *because* we perceive that meaning, it owes

120 little to semiological techniques of analysis. It is *already* available to us. This is the case with the French soldier/*Paris-Match* example. It does not take a semiologist to interpret that image as an image of French Imperialism. But where we do *not* accept the initial ideological description, finding it implausible, far-fetched, etc, then no amount of semiological analysis will convince. Semiological analysis in this instance is either powerless or redundant.

Hall attempts to resolve this dilemma by recourse to a distinction between 'open' and 'closed' structuralism: between a technical 'reading' which limits itself to the level of denotation, which is closed presumably because this level is (mistakenly) taken to be finite, and in some obscure sense, closer to 'nature' than to 'culture', and a reading which moves on to the level of connotation and makes use of extrinsic sources – society, history – in making that reading. Open indeed! Once more, free reign is given to intuition and there are no methodological constraints on interpretations. Sometimes they are insightful, sometimes compelling. But once more we are deprived of a *method*, and left only with fortuitous genius of a Barthes in perceiving certain ideological meanings, and persuading us that they are genuine. At this point the whole elaborate armentarium of semiological analysis is covertly abandoned. In 'S/Z', Barthes elaborates the concept of connotation, and attempts to specify its different codes. He includes a cultural code, thus allowing the importation of cultural meanings into the text itself. This depends on a broad view of semiology which sees society itself as a coded discourse. It does not however help our present problem, for whether we view socio-cultural structures as codes or not, our ability to decode a text which includes culturally derived meanings is in no way enhanced. We need independent knowledge of those social and cultural codes *before* we can identify their usage in a text.

In Camargo's case, the jettisoning of semiology at this point is overt. He writes

... there is something more in the communication which we cannot apprehend only by following the line from the emission of a message full of meaning, to its reception ... there is something beyond the universe of codes and sub-codes ... ie something beyond semiology; this is ideology.<sup>13</sup>

He reiterates Hall's suggestion that at this point we turn to something extrinsic to the communication, to our knowledge of society, culture and history, in order to extract the ideological connotations of messages. This suggestion needs to be taken seriously, but this is a programme which must be carried through more systematically than has so far been envisaged; and the issue is clouded by the failure to distinguish between the task of establishing ideological meanings, themes, concepts, and that of explaining their structure. Semiology is the proper tool for the second task; it is in

no sense 'beyond semiology'. But is inadequate to tackle the first . . . and it is in turn dependent upon the solution of the first, more primary problem, which is a semantic one. The recourse to 'extrinsic' sources is necessary here, that is to say, for establishing some rudimentary lexicon and thematics of ideological discourse. For we cannot know how ideological discourse is coded until we know what it *means*.

How is this massive programme to be achieved? Barthes has already made a small start in relation to the myths of modern society; and if his contribution is based on intuitions of meaning rather than on any imitable technique, they are valuable nonetheless. How should the rest of us proceed, caught between a reliance upon an intuitive genius which we may simply not possess, and mechanical methods which do not tell us what we want to know? Hall suggests that we draw upon our knowledge of history and society; yet this is precisely what is most lacking in structural analyses of the type under discussion. What we must do is to place the work in a *specific* socio-historical context, and try to hypothesise its possible significance for specific groups of social actors. We may see this in relation to Barthes' first, less celebrated example, the latin phrase. How do we know, he asks, that 'my name is Lion' signifies not something about a fabulous Lion, or not only that, but a grammatical relationship which it embodies? We know because of the context, which is precisely spelt out; it is addressed to a pupil in a Latin class at school, in a school primer. How rarely is the relevant socio-historical context of myth and ideology spelt out in comparable detail? The ideology embedded in the popular culture of capitalist society is of course 'bourgeois ideology'. But capitalism in its mature form has existed for over 200 years, and the bourgeoisie for longer still. Capitalism and the bourgeoisie have a history, which is seldom reflected in the redescrptions of their myths as bourgeois myths. The fragments of ideology which Barthes exposes are specific and varied, but they are all indifferently assigned to that most general of categories, 'bourgeois ideology'. This category becomes a substitute for analysis, a kind of creeping paranoia that sees behind the rich particularities of popular culture, a front for a single unchanging ideological reality.

The concept of ideology points two ways; to the cultural artefacts and behaviours within which it is embedded, and whose own specific structural organisation has to be understood if we are to 'read' them correctly; and to society and the social groups whose ideology they are, and in relation to whose situation the artefacts have ideological meaning. Our understanding of ideology will remain incomplete until *both* of its terms are brought together. This is not to present a reductionist programme which explains away cultural products, but is to assert that we cannot understand the very *meaning* of ideological artefacts unless we understand

122 their sociological context. The writer who came closest to this programme was Lucien Goldmann,<sup>14</sup> a self-styled 'genetic structuralist', whose work is in many ways outside the structuralist mainstream.<sup>15</sup>

The 'knowledge of society and history' which Hall alleges is necessary to the understanding of ideology cannot be casually acquired, and *pace* Barthes, it probably cannot be acquired by semiological means — at least we have yet to see successfully adumbrated a sociology which has a semiological base. It is not a mere backdrop to the semiological research programme. Modern capitalism is as complex as the ideological structures which it creates. To understand the latter, we must have a specific theoretical and empirical knowledge of the former. The research programme for the understanding of ideology is located in both semiology *and* sociology. Neither one can proceed without the other.

#### Notes

1. C Metz, 'Etude Syntagmatique du film *Adieu Phillipinè* de Jacques Rozier (in collab. with M Lacoste) in *Essais sur la Signification au Cinéma*, vol 1, Klincksieck, Paris 1968.
2. T Todorov, 'The Structural Analysis of Literature: the tales of Henry James' in D Robey, ed, *Structuralism: An Introduction*, Clarendon Press, 1973.
3. R Barthes, *Mythologies*, Cape 1972.
4. J Culler, 'The Linguistic Basis of Structuralism', in Robey, *op cit*.
5. R Barthes, *op cit*.
6. U Eco, 'Towards a Semiotic Enquiry into the Television Message', *Cultural Studies* no 3, Autumn 1972.
7. S Hall, 'The Determinations of the News Photograph', *Cultural Studies* no 3; 'The Social Eye of Picture Post', *Cultural Studies* no 2.
8. R Barthes, *op cit*, p 115.
9. M de Camargo, 'Ideological Analysis of the Message: a bibliography', *Cultural Studies* no 3.
10. S Hall, 'The Determinations of the News Photograph', p 65.
11. R Barthes, *Writing, Degree Zero*, Cape.
12. In 'S/Z', Barthes' view of denotation is more ambiguous, shifting between the view of 'denotation as a level of 'objective' and more 'truthful' signification, and a view that the 'innocence' and 'objectivity' of denotation is merely illusory.
13. M de Camargo, *op cit*, p 132.
14. L Goldmann, *The Hidden God*, 1964.
15. Cf R Macksey and E Donato, eds, *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: the Structuralist Controversy*, John Hopkins Press, 1971; and B Brewster's review in *Screen* v 12, n 1, 1971, 'Structuralism in Film Criticism'.

April 1973

Dear Sir,

Before the debate between Sam Rohdie and Victor Perkins descends to mutual mud-slinging, I feel that it is essential to take stock of the critical problems involved.

Mr Perkins' warning about *Cahiers* is salutary. I say this not because I disagree with their stance – I don't, although it's not the *only* stance, but because I think that they have tried to take on too much too soon. As a result of May 1968, they have felt obliged to assimilate, virtually overnight, Marx and Althusser, Freud and Lacan, Saussure and Barthes, Metz and the *Tel Quel* group, a task which is, to put it mildly, impossible. A more fruitful approach would surely be to *discuss* the various steps in *Cahiers'* critical/political evolution – see the Editorial in nos 242-243 – as well as merely printing translations.

This rather disturbing tendency to accept one's allies uncritically – at least up till now – finds its corollary in Mr Rohdie's willingness to attack his enemies without giving any reason. Witness his comments on Robin Wood. After a carefully chosen passage from Mr Wood's analysis of *Red Line 7000*, Mr Rohdie dismisses Mr Wood with the remark: 'So much for ideas'. One could have gone along with this if Mr Rohdie had followed with his own analysis of the movie, thus at the same time refuting Mr Wood and presenting his own critical method.

The main bone of contention seems to lie in the question of a feeling of 'completeness' and 'coherence' in a movie, the difference between a movie absorbing its tensions on one hand and making them explicit on the other, the difference between Hitchcock and recent Godard. Here I would say that Mr Rohdie's approach has more to offer and I don't see why Hawks is necessarily superior to a director who is self-conscious in the presentation of his material. It is significant that there is no discussion in Mr Perkins's book about the two Hollywood directors who set out to question the genres in which they worked by a systematic destruction of the various codes at work: Lang and Sirk. The former should surely be looked upon as the father of the modern *film de rupture* because of the way he questioned the entire basis of the commercial cinema by underlining the fact that what one is watching is only one illusion of reality among many, forcing the spectator to realise that the film before his eyes is just one more illusion.

At the same time I'm not sure how this method would work when applied to a director like Hawks who worked within the



124 system without ever questioning it, who accepted the various genres and created personal works within the limits of the codes. I would therefore agree with Mr Perkins when he challenges Mr Rohdie about the possibility of elaborating a method that is capable of analysing movies as different as *La Règle du Jeu* and *Othon* from the same standpoint. Perhaps Renoir is not the best example as his best works were a comment on a certain sort of cinema by the way they presented old ideas in a new way, but they nevertheless contain nothing like the dialectic between ancient and modern Rome that occurs in Straub's movie.

*Screen's* role should be one of de-mystification and the danger of Mr Rohdie seeming to lay down the law is that the opposite will be the result. The entire British critical scene has just been nicely annihilated by Charles Barr's piece recently and it is essential that *Screen* should be free from the virus of creating cults whose purpose is to recuperate works that threaten the culture of the dominant ideology. The BFI and the posh dailies and weeklies have given us a Bergman cult, an Antonioni cult, a Godard cult and now a Jancsó cult. Next for the chop may be Oshima and Makavejev. Post-1968 Godard should probably escape without difficulty, providing the art cinemas show his earlier movies frequently enough to prevent people asking about such works as *Tout va Bien* (one of the key movies of the last decade and the most important and far-reaching challenge to conventional left-wing thought yet). The much-vaunted 'objective' (sic) approach is just another way of isolating a politically subversive movie so that potential spectators won't be led to ask embarrassing questions about such trivial matters as the influence of May 1968 on Godard (and others). Perhaps *Screen's* approach should also include analyses of individual movies made both within and outside the system to ascertain the role played by the dominant culture in them and the ways they either reinforce or subvert that culture. It is surely essential to put theory into practice.

Yours sincerely,  
Reynold Humphries.  
August 1973

Dear Sir,

I am grateful to have had the opportunity of seeing the galley proofs of Christine Gledhill's article *Notes for a Summer School: Godard, Criticism and Education* and of offering a reply to the assertion therein of the BFI Education Department's abnegation of editorial responsibility in relation to the Godard Study Unit.

Producing a Study Unit is a rather more attenuated activity than writing a magazine article. Once the ideal filmic components are decided upon (usually three extracts and a feature film) these must be negotiated with the various companies holding the rights.

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If permission is forthcoming and if suitable sources exist to print from, the often lengthy technical process of preparing the material begins (quite often the material has to be redone on account of mistakes, both human and technical, by the labs). On almost every Study Unit I have been responsible for, ideal choices of material (ie that material which best illuminated the questions being investigated) were not possible and compromises had to be made. I offer this account not as a defence against Christine Gledhill's charges, but to indicate that the context in which Study Units are produced is one of crises, disappointments and compromises and not just one of scholarly reflection.

Within this context, however, one has several factors in mind when commissioning Study Units. Clearly the central factor is to identify and illuminate what seem to be the crucial issues within an important area of film study, but there are other factors too. One wants to produce a collection of material cheap enough to be used by teachers with not too large budgets and, in terms of the actual writing of the material, to provide a means for younger critics/teachers to engage in the film study debate and, by so doing, furnish themselves with the evidence required by education authorities that they are equipped to occupy film teaching posts.

To deal specifically with the Godard Study Unit: it was commissioned in 1970 from Steve Crofts, then a relatively new teacher, on the basis of an article he had written in *Cinema*. Christine Gledhill is perfectly correct when she says that Steve's Study Unit notes represent an attempt to deal with materialist cinema by applying an apparatus evolved within the idealist tradition. But that is not the same as 'ideological complicity'. Does Christine Gledhill *really* believe that the distinction between materialist aesthetics and idealist aesthetics is always clear-cut and straight-forward? Steve's *Cinema* piece and his Study Unit notes seemed to me when I received them, and still seem to me, useful, responsible and aware of the issues Godard poses. Much of their interest lies in his attempts to come to grips with later Godard with the critical tools then at his disposal. In 1970, Steve's work on Godard seemed to me by far the best material on Godard available and I recall that sometime between then and the attack on it in Christine Gledhill's article, the Editor of *Screen* approached me with a view to reprinting the Study Unit notes in *Screen*.

I think that the critical apparatus of Steve's Study Unit notes has in certain respects been called in question by the subsequent debate about materialist cinema, particularly by Peter Wollen's piece 'Counter-Cinema: *Vent d'est*', but my impression is that Steve Crofts' position has shifted in the meantime and, were he writing those Study Unit notes today, they would very likely be quite different. Christine Gledhill thinks that the Unit makes no provision for leading the teacher through the issues. I disagree, although

126 I can now see how the issues could have been more sharply articulated. But teachers are not empty vessels waiting to receive the Word from the Ark of the Covenant. They are engaged in a *process* in which BFI Study Units are simply one of many influences and pieces of material. I would think it likely that several teachers have done useful work on Godard on the basis of the Unit, but then you'd have to ask the teachers themselves about that.

Regarding my own editorial role in relation to the Godard Unit: if the Unit were being set up today rather than in 1970, it would certainly contain different or at least additional material and would also be more tightly editorialised along the lines suggested by Christine Gledhill. But then we have all had a couple of years to think about film and about education. It wasn't many years ago that the BFI Education Department refrained from indicating in its documentation why particular study extracts were chosen for fear of determining too exclusively the ways in which teachers used them. We have moved a long way from that position and now believe that the setting out of contexts, the making explicit of issues, is vitally important. This is not a position we have reached overnight, but is the result of our thinking and experience over the last few years. *Screen* has clearly been an important influence in this direction, but more in its theoretical stance than in its practice. To take the recent Metz issue as an example, it seems to me to fail adequately to place semiology for a British readership. What seems to be lacking is an essay on French thought in the sixties explaining the impulses which underpin the work of Louis Althusser and others, their central concepts (eg *problematic, break, overdetermination, reading, writing, inscription*, etc) and how these concepts function in the work of contemporary French writers on the cinema.

In other words, *Screen* as well as the BFI Education Department has lessons to learn when it comes to 'sign-posting' material for its constituency.

Yours sincerely,

Colin McArthur,

Editor of Film Study Materials,  
BFI Educational Advisory Service.